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Group support for political violence: The role of emotions and expressive choice in creating conflict or providing peace

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Abstract

This paper provides a rationale for group support for political violence which does not provide a material benefit. Rabin's (1993) theory of fairness is adopted to demonstrate that although group violence may not be a Nash equilibrium it may be a fairness equilibrium in a game containing psychological payoffs. For this to happen the material stakes must be perceived as low and psychological payoffs are expressive. Although the material stakes are actually high, members of each group may choose expressively to support the use of violence because the probability of being decisive is low. The paper also considers the possibility of peace emerging as a fairness equilibrium. This can only happen if each group perceives the other as making some sacrifice in choosing peace.

KEY WORDS

political violence; fairness equilibrium; expressive choice

JEL Classification

D72; D74

1 Introduction

Fearon (2006) provides a survey of work on ethnic mobilisation and ethnic violence. Within that survey he discusses explanations for ethnic violence. Violent conflict (whether ethnic or not) is a puzzle from a rationalist perspective as conflict is inefficient. In reviewing possible explanations he draws attention to the idea that ‘violence is a tool by which political elites maintain or increase their political support’, but that the ‘central theoretical puzzle for such ‘diversionary’ arguments is why publics would increase their support for a leader who takes actions, such as provoking ethnic violence, that by hypothesis makes them worse off’. (p. 863). This paper will attempt to address this theoretical puzzle.

Rationalist explanations for conflict can be divided into the three main explanations reviewed by Fearon (1995); bargaining failures due to private information (for example in Cetinyan (2002)); commitment problems (for example in Fearon (2004)) and issue indivisibilities (as, for example, implied by Bernholz (2004)) on terrorism and supreme values). In the next section we will review the rationalist literature on support for violence which may make sense from a material perspective (in the absence of commitment to an efficient outcome), but the crux of Fearon’s puzzle is the support for violence where it does not provide an obvious material benefit, in fact, the violence leads to a predictable material loss. Problems of commitment and indivisibilities still play a background role in this paper.¹ The key difference in the setting depicted here, is that they are not sufficient to explain the existence of group conflict, as group conflict is not depicted as the equilibrium of a material game. Rather group conflict emerges when emotions are added to the analysis.

Rationalist explanations arguably suffer from downplaying the role of emotions when emotions clearly seem to play a central role in group conflict.² Fearon and Laitin (2000) observe that anger seems to play a clear role in

¹Powell (2006) argues that indivisibilities can be subsumed under commitment problems.

²Horowitz (1985) famously wrote that ‘A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory’. (p. 140).

group conflict, and such that it often seems to be the case that launching an attack against a strong opponent provokes a predictably harsh response which in turn generates in-group anger and support for violence. We might extend this observation and argue that the same sort of mechanism is in play within the strong group, namely that if launching a harsh response is likely to prolong the violence emanating from the weak group surely then emotions must be playing a part in the support for the harsh response. Sambanis (2004) provides a critique of empirical tests of economic models of civil war such as Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004). As part of his call for greater use of case studies is the idea that case studies do better at identifying micro-level details such as emotional response. Sambanis argues that emotional and economic theories can be combined with ‘emotion-based explanations as focusing on the demand side of the equation and economic models as focusing on the supply side. As we develop more of the demand side, it becomes obvious that ideology and psychology cannot be ignored as explanations of civil war.’ (p. 268). This paper is an effort in that direction; an attempt to set-up an emotionally based model of the demand for violence but one that can be incorporated within a rational choice framework.³

This paper explores a setting where one group is weak relative to a strong group. This can be viewed as a relatively strong incumbent being opposed by a relatively weak group. In a choice between passivity and aggression the strong group is depicted as having a dominant strategy to be aggressive in response to whatever action the weak group takes. If the weak group is aggressive, at a relatively small cost the strong group is better off fighting than conceding and if the weak group is passive for a small cost of aggression the strong group is better off claiming all of the issue under dispute than striking a bargain with the weak group. In response to aggression by the

³Laitin (1995) calls into question macro level explanations for political violence, given that macro conditions were similar in Catalonia and Basque Country and Ukraine and Georgia. He argues that political violence became a feature of political interaction in Basque Country and Georgia, but not in Catalonia and Ukraine because of differences in micro level factors. Demand for violence is implicit in his focus on ‘social organization’. The analysis presented here will place emotionally driven demand for violence as a central micro explanation for the existence of political violence and if such a demand is lacking, political violence will not exist or cannot be sustained.

strong group the weak group should in its material interest concede since fighting will only bring costly defeat for no gain over the issue.

Emotions are incorporated by turning to behavioural economics and Rabin's (1993) theory of fairness and exploring why the weak group might actually choose aggression in response to aggression. Rabin's theory tells us that so long as the stakes are not so high, we can expect to see reciprocal behaviour such that harmful actions are met with harmful actions and helpful actions are met with helpful actions. A key challenge, however, is to explain why we should ever expect the stakes to be low when group conflict is clearly a high stakes game? We point to the crucial role of mass collective action. As groups become larger, individual decisiveness in determining the group action falls such that the instrumental stakes fall. This means that the indirect material costs of engaging in conflict may be discounted, but the direct expressive benefits of reciprocation may be exaggerated compared to their actual importance for *ex post* welfare. As a result, weak group members may choose aggression as an angry expressive response to aggression by the strong group, even though if they were decisive they would not have made such a choice. If a sufficient number of members choose aggression (so that those willing to use violence feel they have a sufficient constituency that supports them) then the group will engage in aggression.

Fearon's central puzzle focuses on members of a weak group supporting violence that makes them worse-off. This paper pays close attention to that idea, but extends the question to ask why the strong group may not be inclined to reward seemingly helpful behaviour by the weak group and thus provide for the Pareto superior outcome of mutual peace compared to mutual aggression. We argue that it is important for members of the strong group to actually believe that if the weak group chooses passivity that this choice is not simply in their material interests in any case. If they believe that the weak group is making sacrifices in the pursuit of peace then peace may be possible.

2 Related Literature

The key feature of this paper is that members of the competing groups may support violent attacks on the other group, even though the violent attack provokes a harsh response that makes group members materially worse-off. The group approval provides an incentive for those willing to use violence even when there is no great likelihood that the violence will succeed. Faria and Arce (2012) distinguish between ‘ultimate outcome goals’ and ‘process goals’ for violent organisations. The process goals can refer to financing, recruitment and crucially from the perspective of this paper, popular opinion. Creating a backlash can sustain violence by achieving process goals through popular support, even if outcome goals (for example, winning the conflict) are not achieved. In the rest of this section we will briefly review papers that provide empirical evidence of the importance of public support in sustaining violence; theoretical papers where violence is supported because it is in the instrumental (material) interest of the public to do so and finally literature that recognises the role of emotions in the non-instrumental support of violence and key references in the literature on expressive choice.

The paradox, as stated, is why the in-group public incentivise (by providing support) the use of violence in situations where it makes them worse-off. The phenomenon of insurgent violence, met by incumbent crackdowns, followed by support from members of both groups for the use of violence would seem to be widespread. Fearon and Laitin (2000) in their unconventional review of a number of books exploring ethnic conflict find considerable evidence of the use of violence to construct antagonistic ethnic identities which generates more violence and material loss. Tessler and Robbins (2007) stress the importance of public support for terrorists and explore Arab support for attacks against the United States. Jaegar et al (2012) study the phenomenon of support for violence in Palestine. They find that Palestinians that spent their formative years (ages 14-17) during the first Palestinian uprising hold significantly more radical positions than would be normally predicted, whereas individuals who spent their formative years during the Oslo peace

negotiations are more moderate than would be predicted. This suggests empirical evidence for the violence breeding violence thesis. Krueger and Maleckova (2009) and Maleckova and Stanisic (2011) examine the effect of public opinion on terrorism and find that terrorism is positively related with unfavourable views of the target country. If this were not the case, the supply of terrorism would seem to be unrelated to support for it, so public opinion appears to be a key motivator for violence.

There have been a number of theoretical papers where the use of violence to mobilise support plays a central role. Faria and Arce (2005) analyse the necessity of generating popular support in order to provide a large enough pool of potential recruits. In de Figueiredo and Weingast (2001), suppression by an in-group moves the preferences of moderates within an out-group closer to radicals within the out-group. This provides a motive for terrorism; the ultimate bargain may be closer to radical preferences. In Rosendorff and Sandler (2004) the mobilisation of support is linked to heavy-handed approaches by government. While both these papers recognise the phenomenon they both assume that violence met with violence generates support for the perpetrators of violence and they do not analyse why this would be the case. Other papers have attempted to endogenise the decision. Hamlin and Jennings (2007) argue that the support of extremists willing to use violence makes instrumental sense when the anticipated cost of conflict is relatively low. In this case it is worth incurring conflict costs because the extremists will produce a better bargain than a moderate and peaceful approach. Appelbaum (2008) also analyses the strategic role of extremism as a bargaining tool despite the existence of conflict costs. In Ginkel and Smith (1999), dissident violence signals to the public that they represent that the incumbent is fragile and as a result the public may offer their support. This may succeed such as in the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, or it may fail as in Tiananmen Square in the same year. In the case of failure this looks like a potential answer to the paradox, the motivation for support for violence or rebellion is that supporters wrongly calculated that the rebellion would succeed.

Siqueira and Sandler (2006) model competition between government and

terrorists for supporters. The dilemma facing the government is that while a harsh crackdown reduces the probability of success for terrorists and thus also its attractiveness to potential supporters, shifting resources out of public spending reduces the opportunity cost of supporting terror. Significantly, Siqueira and Sandler also include an exogenous parameter for underlying support for terrorism. Bueno de Mesquita (2005) models terrorist recruitment and Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson (2007) model the competition between doves and hawks within a group rebelling against the government. Similarly to Siqueira and Sandler, these papers argue that a crackdown in response to violence can increase or reduce mobilisation, based on the balance of increased security which reduces support against ideological fomentation and reduced economic opportunity which increases support.

These papers provide an answer as to why public support might follow crackdowns; reduced economic opportunity and fomentation may outweigh the effect of a reduced probability of winning. However, this explanation for political support does not address the paradox of support for violence which by hypothesis makes the supporters worse-off. It appears that there are a significant number of cases where the material calculation should really point towards the support for peaceful negotiation but yet the support is for those that perpetrate violence. In the last three papers discussed, ideology is an argument in the utility function and in the Bueno de Mesquita (2005) case, it is assumed to be increasing with the severity of the crackdown. This is an emotional dimension and the endogenisation of emotional payoffs and their trade-off with material payoffs provides the focus for this paper.

That emotions such as anger exist in conflict is well-documented. Gordon and Arian (2001) find that the stronger the threat, the more belligerent the policy choice. They argue that when one feels threatened the decision-making process with regard to policy is dominated by emotions rather than logic. Halperin (2008) finds that group-based hatred helps to interpret events and direct behaviour in a way that contributes to the continuation of the conflict. Maoz and McAuley (2008) look at the demand for aggressive policies by a strong group in response to a weak group. They find support for both perception of threat and dehumanisation as determinants of de-

mand. The latter factor implies hatred as a determinant of policy. Halperin and Bar-Tal (2011) analyse emotional factors that hinder the processing of proposals that could contribute to conflict resolution.

Empirical work testing the predictions of rent-seeking and contest models repeatedly shows excessive effort levels relative to the theoretical predictions (see Sheremeta (2013)). Recent theoretical work on contests has incorporated the role of emotions and thus provides a psychological rationale for excessive effort levels. Amegashie and Runkel (2012) analyse the role of revenge in either increasing or decreasing conflict. They use a contest success function and analyse two counteracting effects: a value of revenge effect which increases effort and a self-deterrence effect which reduces effort in order to reduce revenge by the opponent. The balance of these two effects determine whether effort levels are higher or lower than the no-revenge benchmark. This finding has similarities to the analysis to be presented here in that the inclusion of fairness concerns may either increase or decrease violence relative to a game where such concerns do not exist. However, the analysis is different in crucial respects. In models using contest success functions the variable of interest is the investment in rent-seeking or conflict effort. Given that effort levels in games with contest success functions are invariably positive, conflict (or the shadow of conflict) always exists in equilibrium. It can only be eliminated through a binding agreement to provide commitment. The concern in this paper is not with effort levels but to endogenise the decision to engage in conflict or peace (without binding agreement). In addition, the Amegashie and Runkel paper whilst also capturing a psychological impulse, treats the groups as organic units so that all decisions are consequential. The analysis conducted here shows that when a decision to engage in conflict or peace is a consequential decision, psychological concerns are swamped by standard material concerns. It is only when a decision is largely inconsequential (due to individuals choosing within a collective decision) that psychological concerns can overturn standard material results.

Hoffman and Kolmar (2013), utilise (as in this paper) Rabin's model to explore excessive effort and overdissipation of rents in contests. Given that

Hoffman and Kolmar use Rabin’s approach to fairness concerns in a contest model, their analysis is very close to the spirit of the analysis presented here. They find the inclusion of fairness concerns leads to overdissipation of rents (for example, there is a positive effort level even when the value of the rent is zero) but find that as rents become bigger the overdissipation result is less pronounced because the stakes are too high. Hoffman and Kolmar’s paper differs from the analysis here, first, in that our main concern is endogenising conflict or peace, not effort level. As with Amegashie and Runkel, in Hoffman and Kolmar peace would mean zero effort levels which cannot hold in equilibrium. Second, despite the use of fairness concerns in the Hoffman and Kolmar model there is no positive reciprocity (which would reduce effort levels below the standard benchmark). This seems to be a drawback of the contest success function. In the analysis in this paper, positive reciprocity is possible because choices are presented as binary between conflict and peace. Third, as stated if rents are large the overdissipation results begins to evaporate in Hoffman and Kolmar. This happens because, once again, groups are treated as organic units thus making consequential decisions. Once it is recognised that in collective action individual choices may be largely inconsequential, high stakes games can be converted into low stakes such that conflict (or peace) may be an equilibrium even though the stakes are actually high.⁴

A crucial component of the analysis presented here is that emotional decision-making in circumstances of conflict may be expressive. This refers to the idea that since individual decisions are unlikely to be decisive in determining outcomes, instrumental decision-making which focuses on the indirect benefit of choosing X in order to achieve Y may give way to expressive benefits which focuses on the utility directly gained from making the decision to choose X and this is disconnected from eventual outcomes. This

⁴Sano (2014) produces a similar analysis to that in Hoffman and Kolmar in that preferences for reciprocity are embedded within a contest function. Sano finds ‘destructive’ equilibria with overdissipation of rents, but unlike Hoffman and Kolmar, ‘constructive’ equilibria are possible with smaller levels of dissipation relative to Nash equilibrium. However, the conditions required for ‘constructive’ equilibria are extremely restrictive which reinforces the difficulty in finding positive reciprocity in contest success functions.

generates two key insights. First, it helps explain collective action where instrumental logic would suggest free-riding. Second, expressive choice, given that it is ‘inconsequential’, may differ from the choice that would be predicted to be made instrumentally. Normatively, this may be good or bad depending on the context. In this paper, both Pareto superior and inferior outcomes emerging from expressive choice relative to the outcome that would be predicted instrumentally will be considered. A key challenge for theories of expressive choice is to provide a solid theoretical foundation. This paper attempts to do this by identifying choices that differ from the standard approach by using the behavioural approach found in Rabin’s theory of fairness and the focus on psychological payoffs as a trade-off with standard material payoffs. With the behavioural distinction established, expressiveness operates so as to amplify the importance of psychological payoffs in decision-making.

The literature on expressive choice is both theoretically and empirically extensive. Although the idea was not new, its significance for democratic decision-making reached a wide audience with the publication of Brennan and Lomasky (1993). Glazer (2008) analyses the idea that in an electoral context, voters may expressively vote to anger opponents who have angered them. In doing so, he makes the link to Rabin’s model. Hillman (2010) links expressive choice to an individual’s sense of identity. A sense of identity and group belonging is clearly relevant in the context of group conflict. Hillman describes socially inferior outcomes caused by expressive choice as ‘expressive policy traps’. We will see the possibility of such an expressive trap as the main focus of the analysis presented here, but we will also see that expressive choice can create the possibility for peace that would not otherwise exist. Expressive choice has usually been applied to voting. Voting provides ideal conditions for its operation because it is an individual choice within a collective action with low probability of being decisive. It is anonymous and preferences are aggregated in a simple deterministic way. While voting may be one way to provide support for violence or peace (through voting for representatives of these approaches), support may be provided in other ways. This could be attending marches, demonstrations and more subtly

through various networks of community support. While these actions are harder to aggregate into a collective decision and are more prone to social pressure and thus less easy to describe as expressive, it is our contention that in many high profile conflicts individual support is offered voluntarily but because it is inconsequential it can be correctly labelled as expressive. For a broad overview of work on expressive choice which also considers it in settings more general than formal elections, see Hamlin and Jennings (2011).

3 The Model

The key point to take from the previous section is that there is substantial evidence of support for violence that is not in the material interests of those that offer such support. It is not the case that violence requires the full support of the group from which it emanates. It will only require the support of a sufficient number of group members to satisfy a process rather than an outcome goal for the violent organisation. The model presented here will attempt (in contrast to earlier related work) to endogenise the reason why a threshold of group members may be willing to offer support for aggression even though they would be materially better off if there were peace. It is noted that the model to be presented may appear restrictive. The standard rational choice approach to modelling conflict is to use a contest success function (see Garfinkel and Skaperdas (2007) for an overview) or predator/prey models (see Mitra and Ray (2014) for an example) in which both approaches endogenise effort levels expended on conflict. In contrast, this model considers a simple binary choice of conflict or peace, where the costs and benefits are fixed. A key motivation is that the interest of this paper is to incorporate fairness concerns and endogenise conflict or peace as equilibrium outcomes. As discussed earlier in reference to the papers by Amegashie and Runkel (2012), Hoffman and Kolmar (2013) and Sano (2014) which also incorporate psychological motivation, conflict (as in positive effort levels) is the only equilibrium outcome. Also, as mentioned earlier in the Hoffman and Kolmar model positive reciprocity is not possible despite the inclusion of fairness concerns. This is a possible outcome in the analysis

to be conducted here. So though the model appears simple, in order to capture the choice between conflict and peace and the full potential of the role played by fairness concerns the model is appropriate.

We begin by depicting the general form of the normal-form game played between a weak and a strong group. Players can choose to be aggressive or passive and the payoffs are as follows where we start by considering a two-player setting

		Strong Group	
		agg	pass
	agg	$-c_{aw}, (R - c_{as})$	$(R - c_{dw}), 0$
Weak Group	pass	$0, (R - c_{ds})$	$\bar{\alpha}R, (1 - \bar{\alpha})R$

Figure 1

We assume there is an issue or space that can be divided between the two groups such that the allocation to each group sums to R . When one group is passive and the other aggressive, the passive group member receives 0 and the aggressive group member receives R . When there is mutual aggression the stronger group wins and their members receive R while the weak group members receive 0.⁵ c_{dw} and c_{ds} are aggression costs for the weak and strong group members when confronted by passive opponents. These costs reflect the idea that in order to repress the other group some level of military and other resources required for governance needs to be invested in. The opportunity cost of this investment is higher for the weak group members than the strong group members so that $c_{ds} < c_{dw}$. The costs of aggression for the weak and strong group members when there is mutual aggression are c_{aw} and c_{as} . We assume that $c_{dw} < c_{aw}$ and $c_{ds} < c_{as}$. This reflects the idea that costs of aggression are higher when met by aggression from

⁵This is obviously a strong assumption. One might argue that fights that appear one-sided today may in the future lead to concessions and achieve their purpose. This observation does not undermine the approach taken here. By showing that a weak group may engage in conflict with a strong opponent when defeat is guaranteed then clearly the result is even more likely to hold if the weak group were likely to secure some concessions through conflict.

the other side compared to passivity. If both groups are passive, aggression costs are removed and there will be a distribution of the issue such that $0 < \bar{\alpha} < 1$, $\bar{\alpha}$ is assumed indivisible so that if there is to be a peace deal regarding the distribution of R , then this is the only one available. The focus of the paper is not on bargaining and how commitment can be made to any bargain that is struck. The paper assumes indivisibilities and commitment problems and depicts a game where the existence of these problems is not sufficient to explain mutual aggression. Rather they need to be combined with emotionality.

We assume that the ranking of the material payoffs for each player (where the best payoff is ranked 1 and the lowest payoff is ranked 4) is as follows

		Strong Group	
		agg	pass
	agg	4, 3	1 or 2, 4
Weak Group			
	pass	3,1	1 or 2, 2

Figure 2

The payoffs for the strong group members are assumed to be unambiguous. The best outcome for the strong group member would be (pass, agg). This means that they concede nothing and since the weak group does not resist the costs of aggression are low. The next best is (pass, pass). We wish only to study games where aggression is a dominant material strategy for the strong group member. Therefore, $\bar{\alpha} > c_{ds}$ is an assumption, but one that is justifiable where bargaining outcomes cannot be smoothed so that it is not possible for the value of $\bar{\alpha}$ to be continuous from 0 to 1. Finally, we assume that mutual conflict with victory (agg, agg) is preferred to the avoidance of conflict but making full concessions to the weak group.

For the weak group member the worst outcome is (agg, agg). They will lose the conflict because they are weak and thus gain no concessions despite incurring aggression costs. The second worst outcome is assumed to be (pass, agg) because they receive no concessions although they do not incur aggression costs. We will analyse two different permutations of payoffs

based on the following possibilities. If the weak group is very weak or $\bar{\alpha}$ is relatively large (pass, pass) may be preferable to (agg, pass) as the costs of aggression (even though the aggression is not reciprocated) may be too high to make it worth pursuing full concessions. We will analyse two types of game. The first will consider the case where passivity is a dominant material strategy for the weak group members and the second where it is not. Note though that purely in terms of material payoffs, regardless of the ranking of $(R - c_{dw})$ compared to $\bar{\alpha}R$ there is only one pure strategy Nash equilibrium (pass, agg). Conflict is not a Nash equilibrium.

We will now incorporate the idea of Rabin's fairness equilibria and discover that depending on the material stakes and whether $(R - c_{dw})$ is greater or less than $\bar{\alpha}R$, the Nash equilibrium may be overturned and replaced with fairness equilibria which imply either mutual aggression or mutual passivity. Material stakes will become smaller as the set of group members choosing between aggression and passivity increases within the two groups because the probability of being decisive becomes smaller. This requires expressive benefits which are unrelated to decisiveness. A key part of the analysis is identifying the nature of these expressive benefits.

3.1 Fairness Equilibria

With the game set up, we need to recap on the key ingredients of Rabin's theory of fairness in games before applying it to the subject of this paper - group conflict. Other well-known models of fairness are presented in Fehr and Schmidt (1999), Bolton and Ockenfels (2000), Dufwenberg and Kirchsteiger (2004) and Falk and Fischbacher (2006).⁶ These are less preferable to use as a basis for the approach presented here because the main concern of the players is with the intentions of the other group rather than equality and modelling the game as simultaneous rather than sequential makes it considerably more tractable without any loss in essential insight. From the material game, a psychological game is derived which will determine

⁶The papers just mentioned take fairness concerns as given. There is also a literature within cognitive neuroscience that identifies the source of fairness concerns. See Rilling and Sanfey (2011) for a review of the literature.

each player's psychological utility. This will depend on three factors. The weak group's strategy a_w depends on their belief about the strategy of the strong group b_s and their belief about the strong group's belief regarding their strategy c_w . A similar description applies to the strong player. We focus only on pure strategies, so all strategies and beliefs about strategies are included in the set $\{agg, pass\}$.

We derive a kindness function for the weak player 1, $f_w(a_w, b_s)$ and the weak player's perception of the strong player's kindness $\tilde{f}_s(b_s, c_w)$. These are expressed as follows

$$f_w(a_w, b_s) = \frac{\pi_s(a_w, b_s) - \pi_s^{fair}(b_s)}{\pi_s^{\max}(b_s) - \pi_s^{\min}(b_s)} \quad (1)$$

and

$$\tilde{f}_s(b_s, c_w) = \frac{\pi_w(c_w, b_s) - \pi_w^{fair}(c_w)}{\pi_w^{\max}(c_w) - \pi_w^{\min}(c_w)} \quad (2)$$

$\pi_s(a_w, b_s)$ is the payoff received by the strong player given that they choose strategy b_s and the weak player chooses strategy a_w . $\pi_s^{fair}(b_s)$ is defined as $\frac{[\pi_s^h(b_s) + \pi_s^l(b_s)]}{2}$ and refers to the mid-point between the highest and lowest (Pareto efficient) payoffs the weak player could give to the strong player given that the strong player plays strategy b_s . If the numerator is positive the weak player is being kind to the strong player. If it is negative the weak player is being unkind and if it is zero the weak player's behaviour is neutral in terms of kindness. The function f_w is weighted by the maximum payoff the weak player could give the strong player minus the lowest possible payoff (now including possibly Pareto inefficient payoffs) that the weak player could give the strong player given their choice of b_s . A Pareto inefficient payoff obviously means playing a strategy that will make both parties worse-off compared to an alternative available strategy open to the weak player. The function \tilde{f}_s is analogous to f_w and measures the weak player's perception of the strong player's kindness towards him given their belief that the strong player believes they are playing strategy c_w . Analogous functions f_s and \tilde{f}_w are derived in the same way for the strong player. It will become clear how these payoffs are depicted for the game we are analysing.

The following utility function for the weak player is assumed which incorporates material and psychological payoffs

$$U_w(a_w, b_s, c_w) = \pi_w(a_w, b_s) + \tilde{f}_s(b_s, c_w) [1 + f_w(a_w, b_s)] \quad (3)$$

and similarly for $U_s(a_s, b_w, c_s)$.

π_w refers to the material payoff and $\tilde{f}_s [1 + f_w]$ refers to the psychological payoff. We can see from the psychological payoff that if the weak player believes that the strong player is unkind ($\tilde{f}_s < 0$) then the psychological payoff would be maximised by choosing to be unkind towards the strong player ($f_w < 0$). The reverse is true if the strong player is perceived as being kind and if the strong player is perceived as being neutral ($\tilde{f}_s = 0$) then the psychological payoff is irrelevant. Note though that the possibility of the psychological payoff altering behaviour is dependent upon the material payoff being relatively small. A contribution of this paper is to demonstrate how a high stakes material game such as violent conflict can be converted into a game in which these stakes are reduced and psychological payoffs can change behaviour.

Finally, the pair of strategies $(a_w, a_s) \in (agg, pass)$ is a fairness equilibrium if for $i = w, s$

- (1) $a_w \in \arg \max_{a_w \in S_w} U(a, b_s, c_w)$
- (2) $c_w = b_w = a_w$

3.2 Analysis of the Game

Recall that in an environment where only material payoffs count for utility, regardless of whether $(R - c_{dw})$ is greater or less than $\bar{\alpha}R$ there is a unique pure strategy Nash equilibrium (pass, agg). Aggression is a dominant strategy for the strong group members and the best response for the weak group members is to choose passivity. We will demonstrate for small enough probability of being decisive, in the case where $\bar{\alpha}R > (R - c_{dw})$ so that passivity is a dominant strategy for the weak group, (agg, agg) is a unique fairness equilibrium. In the case where $\bar{\alpha}R < (R - c_{dw})$ for small enough probability of being decisive there are two fairness equilibria, (agg, agg) and (pass,

pass).

3.2.1 Case 1: $\bar{\alpha}R > (R - c_{dw})$

We demonstrate the condition under which (agg, agg) would be the unique fairness equilibrium. We first consider a two player game which provides a useful benchmark as each player is clearly decisive with regard to which action is selected. A way to think about this is as if a single representative has been selected from each group to make the decision on behalf of the group. We will then extend the analysis to multiple players in the two groups simultaneously choosing their preferred action under the assumption that they determine the outcome with probability π_{dw} for members of the weak group and π_{ds} for members of the strong group. These probabilities are less than one and declining in the number of members in each group who are faced with the choice of which action to take. This reflects the lower probability of a single individual determining the action taken by the group, the larger the number of individuals who take part in the group decision process. In the multiple player setting if a sufficient number of group members choose violence to satisfy the process goal of the potential suppliers of violence then violence will be the action taken by the group.

One member in each group We begin by deriving \tilde{f}_s . If the weak group member believes that the strong group believes they are choosing aggression and the strong group chooses aggression in response, they are being unkind to the weak group as shown by

$$\tilde{f}_s = \frac{-c_{aw} - \frac{1}{2}(R - c_{dw} - c_{aw})}{(R - c_{dw}) + c_{aw}} = -\frac{1}{2} \quad (4)$$

If the weak group chooses aggression when they believe that the strong group chooses aggression then

$$f_w = \frac{(R - c_{as}) - (R - c_{ds})}{(R - c_{ds}) - (R - c_{as})} = -1 \quad (5)$$

If the weak group deviates and chooses passivity when they believe that the

strong group chooses aggression then

$$f_w = \frac{(R - c_{ds}) - (R - c_{ds})}{(R - c_{ds}) - (R - c_{as})} = 0 \quad (6)$$

Note that there is only one Pareto efficient choice in response to the choice of aggression by the strong group – namely to choose passivity.

The weak group will choose aggression rather than passivity in response to aggression by the strong group if

$$-c_{aw} - \frac{1}{2}[1 - 1] > 0 - \frac{1}{2}[1 - 0] \quad (7)$$

which reduces to

$$\frac{1}{2c_{aw}} > 1 \quad (8)$$

It is straightforward to check that the strong group would choose aggression in response to weak group aggression. As part of their utility function, $\tilde{f}_w = -1$. So the strong group will choose aggression because $(R - c_{as}) - 1 [1 - \frac{1}{2}] > 0 - 1 [1 + \frac{1}{2}]$. It is both materially and psychologically preferable for the strong group to choose aggression. It is also straightforward to see that (pass, pass) cannot be a fairness equilibrium. The crucial point is that in this case $\tilde{f}_w = 0$. If the strong group chooses passivity, it is in the material interest of the weak group to also choose passively so there is no act of kindness associated with the choice. Since there is no kindness displayed there is no incentive for reciprocity and only material payoffs count for the strong group and as a result they will choose aggression in response to passivity chosen by the weak group.

In this setting, the addition of psychological payoffs would not alter the equilibrium of the game. Given that c_{aw} is to be viewed as a very large number (8) will not hold. Psychological payoffs are swamped by material payoffs and the equilibrium will be (pass, agg).

Multiple members in each group The analysis is now extended to allow for multiple member group decision making. It is assumed that when each individual j in each group makes a decision their choice of action makes

that group action more likely with a probability of π_{dw} and π_{ds} . In the following analysis π_{aw} and π_{as} are the probabilities that the groups choose aggression regardless of the choice of individual j and π_{pw} and π_{ps} are the probabilities that the groups choose passivity regardless of the choice of individual j . Obviously $\pi_a + \pi_p + \pi_d = 1$ for both groups. To capture the role of expressive payoffs a weight θ is introduced where $0 \leq \theta \leq 1$. This is distributed across members of each group. A weak group member j will choose aggression rather than passivity in response to aggression by the strong group if

$$\begin{aligned} & \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{material payoffs} \\ -\pi_{aw}c_{aw} + \pi_{pw}0 - \pi_{dw}c_{aw} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{psychological payoffs} \\ +\pi_{aw}0 + \pi_{dw}0 - \pi_{pw}\frac{1}{2}(1 - \theta_{jw}) + \pi_{pw}0\theta_{jw} \end{array} \right\} > \\ & \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{material payoffs} \\ -\pi_{aw}c_{aw} + \pi_{pw}0 - \pi_{dw}0 \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{psychological payoffs} \\ +\pi_{aw}0(1 - \theta_{jw}) - \pi_{aw}\frac{1}{2}\theta_{jw} - \pi_{dw}\frac{1}{2} - \pi_{pw}\frac{1}{2} \end{array} \right\} \end{aligned} \quad (9)$$

which reduces to

$$\theta_{jw} > \frac{\pi_{dw}(2c_{aw} - 1)}{1 - \pi_{dw}} \quad (10)$$

If $\theta_{jw} = 0$ an individual fully absorbs the psychological payoff that comes from the group decision. So, for example, if the weak group chooses passivity in response to aggression by the strong group, even though the individual chooses aggression he will experience a psychological payoff of $-1/2$. If $\theta_{jw} = 1$ regardless of the group choice, the individual will receive a psychological payoff related to his own choice. So if the group choose passivity in response to strong group aggression, but the individual chooses aggression his psychological payoff will equal zero. This is an expressive payoff. The choice of an action brings a direct payoff and if $\theta_j = 1$ the choice is fully expressive. The action brings a direct psychological payoff which is unrelated to the actual outcome of the game. Essentially, in the example discussed above the individual when choosing aggression but not causing aggression still receives a higher psychological payoff for his reciprocal choice.

For any $\theta_{jw} > 0$ there is an expressive component to the individual's

choice, and from (10) we see that in the limit where $\theta_{jw} = 1$ aggression will be selected by an individual if $\frac{1}{2c_{aw}} > \pi_{dw}$. Earlier we stated that in a 2-player game we would not expect (8) to hold because π_{dw} is equal to one and c_{aw} is assumed large. For multiple members the analysis changes because the instrumental stakes have been lowered by the lower probability of being decisive and for $\theta_{jw} > 0$ the individual receives an expressive payoff even though they are not decisive in determining whether the group behaviour is reciprocal or not. If the number of members of the weak group satisfying (10) is sufficient to satisfy those that wish to supply violence then aggression will be chosen as the group action. Clearly the lower the support required the more likely that aggression will be selected. This implies that a minority of the group in supporting violence may inflict conflict costs on all the group as the suppliers of violence require only a relatively low level of support.⁷

As is the case in the 2-player game it is straightforward to show that strong group members will choose aggression in response to aggression by the weak group because

$$\begin{aligned} & (\pi_{as} + \pi_{ds}) \left(R - c_{as} - \frac{1}{2} \right) + \pi_{ps} \left(0 - \frac{3}{2} (1 - \theta_{js}) - \frac{1}{2} \theta_{js} \right) > \\ & \pi_{as} \left(R - c_{as} - \frac{1}{2} (1 - \theta_{js}) - \frac{3}{2} \theta_{js} \right) + (\pi_{ps} + \pi_{ds}) \left(0 - \frac{3}{2} \right) \end{aligned} \quad (11)$$

which must hold because both the material and psychological payoffs are higher by choosing aggression than passivity.

Also it is straightforward, as before, to show that (pass, pass) cannot be a fairness equilibrium in the multiple player game. The weak group shows no kindness towards the strong group in choosing passivity in response to passivity so psychological payoffs drop out. As a result, aggression is the

⁷Note that suppliers of violence (or peace) are presented as passive participants. If there is sufficient support for violence it will be provided, otherwise it will not. Political leaders are not able to influence this. In reality, this is clearly not true. Hawks and doves can compete for support and often hawks would appear to make emotional appeals while doves appeal to material concerns. In terms of the model, a battle between hawks and doves would essentially be a battle over altering the value of θ such that hawks would aim to increase it and doves would aim to decrease it.

best response for all members of the strong group.

In the Rabin analysis games played between two players are analysed. In these cases for psychological payoffs to dominate and fairness equilibria to emerge the stakes need to be relatively small. So for example, if we consider emotional rejection of offers in the ultimatum game, they are rejected because the psychological gain from rejecting the offer outweighs the low material gain. Rabin provides several convincing arguments to defend the theory against the charge that it is only relevant when it is relatively trivial and this paper attempts to extend this defence to incorporate the nature of group choice in a political setting. We argue that the act of choosing to meet aggression with aggression satisfies a sense of indignation even if actual aggression does not take place. The material payoff, on the other hand, is subject to standard instrumental reasoning. Although the stakes may be exceptionally large if decisive, in mass political action individual decision-makers determine the outcome only with a small probability.⁸

3.2.2 Case 2: $\bar{\alpha}R < (R - c_{dw})$

We now turn to the case where $\bar{\alpha}R < (R - c_{dw})$. Inspection of the payoffs in the game inform us that the weak group would be displaying kindness towards the strong group if they choose passivity in response to passivity by the strong group and it is this that allows for the possibility of a (pass, pass) equilibrium and the maximisation of social surplus. The condition for (agg, agg) to be a fairness equilibrium (10) are the same as before. We now demonstrate the conditions for (pass, pass) to be an equilibrium. The value

⁸The depiction of three possible states mirrors the analysis of peace, repression and war presented in Besley and Persson (2011). They argue that a lack of highly valued public goods and an uneven share of political power prevents peace. Whether or not there is war or repression depends on relative fighting abilities and costs of fighting. If one side has a clear advantage then we should expect repression. The analysis presented here suggests that this is not necessarily the case. If emotions are high, demand for violence is high and this support may be incentivise the supply of violence even when it has little or no hope of success. Levy and Faria (2007) also model three types of equilibrium in a model of potential conflict between two groups, namely, civil war or peace through partition or federation.

of \tilde{f}_s is now

$$\tilde{f}_s = \frac{\bar{\alpha}R - \frac{1}{2}\bar{\alpha}R}{\bar{\alpha}R - 0} = \frac{1}{2} \quad (12)$$

If the weak group chooses passivity $f_w = \frac{1}{2}$ and if they deviate and choose aggression, $f_w = -\frac{1}{2}$. Therefore, passivity will be chosen if

$$\begin{aligned} & (\pi_{aw} + \pi_{dw}) \left(R - c_{dw} + \frac{1}{4} \right) + \pi_{pw} \left(\bar{\alpha}R + \frac{3}{4}(1 - \theta_{jw}) + \frac{1}{4}\theta_{jw} \right) < \\ & \pi_{aw} \left(R - c_{dw} + \frac{1}{4}(1 - \theta_{jw}) + \frac{3}{4}\theta_{jw} \right) + (\pi_{pw} + \pi_{dw}) \left(\bar{\alpha}R + \frac{3}{4} \right) \end{aligned} \quad (13)$$

which reduces to

$$\theta_{jw} > \frac{\pi_{dw} (2(R(1 - \bar{\alpha}) - c_{dw}) - 1)}{1 - \pi_{dw}} \quad (14)$$

For the strong group, $\tilde{f}_w = \frac{1}{2}$ so members will choose passivity over aggression if

$$\begin{aligned} & (\pi_{as} + \pi_{ds}) \left(R - c_{ds} + \frac{1}{4} \right) + \pi_{ps} \left((1 - \bar{\alpha})R + \frac{3}{4}(1 - \theta_{js}) + \frac{1}{4}\theta_{js} \right) < \\ & \pi_{as} \left(R - c_{ds} + \frac{1}{4}(1 - \theta_{js}) + \frac{3}{4}\theta_{js} \right) + (\pi_{ps} + \pi_{ds}) \left((1 - \bar{\alpha})R + \frac{3}{4} \right) \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

which reduces to

$$\theta_{js} > \frac{\pi_{ds} (2(\bar{\alpha}R - c_{ds}) - 1)}{1 - \pi_{ds}} \quad (16)$$

There are now two pure strategy fairness equilibria subject to (10), (14) and (16) holding for sufficient numbers of group members. At first glance this might look like a simple problem of equilibrium selection. Since (pass, pass) Pareto dominates (agg, agg) then it would be expected that (pass, pass) will emerge as the equilibrium outcome. There are, however, a number of issues to explore. First, although (14) and (16) may hold for individual members of each group, it may not be the case that there is a sufficient support for peace that will discourage the potential suppliers of violence from providing it. In this case (pass, pass) cannot be an equilibrium even though we are in a scenario compared to case 1 where a positive level of

support for peace can be generated in the strong group. This is particularly true if the level of support required for violence to occur is a minority of the group(s) population. Supposing the RHS of (10) and (14) to be of similar value, the same set of members who support reciprocal aggression in (10) support reciprocal passivity in (14). If the number in the former is a minority but sufficient to induce violence then it will be insufficient to prevent violence in the latter.

An interesting implication here is that those that are low in expressiveness (low θ) support passivity against aggression in (10) and aggression against passivity in (14). This makes sense. These are individuals that do not have a strong sense of indignation when confronted by an aggressive opponent so they also lack a sense of obligation when confronted by a passive opponent. Both cases might point to different types of conflict trap. In case 1, there are a sufficient number of individuals in the weak group that feel indignation such that they will provide support for aggression. In this case expressiveness causes conflict. In case 2 there may be an insufficient number of individuals in both groups that feel a sense of obligation to the other group, such that support for aggression is sufficient for mutual aggression in equilibrium. In this case, a lack of expressiveness is the cause of conflict.

When only a minority support for aggression is required, it is still possible that (14) will provide sufficient support for peace if the RHS of (14) is sufficiently smaller than the RHS of (10), or $R(1 - \bar{\alpha}) - c_{dw} < c_{aw}$. Clearly this is more likely to hold the larger is c_{aw} and the smaller the gain to the weak group in choosing aggression rather than passivity, given that the strong group chooses passivity. For the strong group (16) is more likely to hold if $\bar{\alpha}R$ is close to c_{ds} which means that there is little to be gained materially by choosing aggression over passivity.

Clearly both (14) and (16) are likely to hold if the perceptions of decisiveness π_{ds} and π_{ds} are very small. In this case low levels of expressiveness would still be sufficient to generate mutual peace. So if we suppose this is the case, it would be tempting to conclude that because (pass, pass) Pareto dominates (agg, agg) then we should expect the former to emerge as the equilibrium. Is it unrealistic to suppose that the latter outcome could

emerge? One reason (although delving beyond the confines of the current model) would be that if there is no history of trust between the groups, that group members are emotional and that they perceive each other as inherently aggressive then (agg, agg) seems a quite plausible candidate as the equilibrium. It is clear that these features would appear to be common characteristics of many conflicts. One key aspect of the analysis here is that roughly the same individual that will feel indignation when they feel they have been wronged will feel obligation when the other group is conciliatory. Perhaps, in reality, the two responses are not symmetric as Baumeister *et al* (2001) suggest in their discussion of ‘bad is stronger than good’ and Offerman (2002) in his discussion of ‘hurting hurts more than helping helps’. If this is the case although the payoffs exist so that positive reciprocation should exist, any psychological tendency for the ‘bad’ to drive out the ‘good’ may eliminate the possibility of a peaceful equilibrium. Indignation may be a more powerful motivator than obligation.

Although the focus in this paper is very much on theory, it is worth, briefly, considering the potential relationship of the model to real world conflict and conflict resolution. An example is the Northern Ireland conflict and subsequent peace agreement. The conflict lasted for roughly 30 years before the Belfast Agreement in 1998.⁹ At the onset of the conflict the Northern Ireland state was run primarily for the benefit of the Unionist community. The Nationalist community was largely passive and support for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was low. When the conflict ignited in the late 1960’s, heavy-handed approaches by the British in response to Nationalist violence spiralled into a significant constituency of support for the IRA. The IRA achieved a ‘process’ goal through obtaining a major con-

⁹For a clear and concise history of the Northern Ireland conflict, see Mulholland (2002). See Jennings (2011) for an analysis of Northern Ireland through electoral results that also discusses expressive motivation. Note support for the perpetrators of violence on both sides of the conflict is meant (as discussed earlier) in the broadest terms as networks of community support of which electoral support is just one of multiple components. This is particularly important given that formal elections are not continual settings in which support can be expressed for violence. The key point is that whatever manner support manifests itself, the likelihood of the support of a single individual being decisive in determining conflict is declining in the size of the group.

stituency of support although the violence itself had no realistic likelihood of succeeding in its stated goal of achieving a united Ireland. In response to IRA violence, support for loyalist paramilitary groups increased which provided them with the constituency of support they needed to engage in violence against the nationalist community. In terms of the model mutual aggression emerged through support for violence which was largely fuelled by sectarian hatred and unrelated to the actual likelihood of any change in the politics of Northern Ireland. The violence was often in revenge for attacks by the other side and it was 'easy' for individuals to expressively support because no individual supporter was decisive. During this period, mutual peace was unobtainable. This is not just because 'bad is stronger than good', although that certainly played a role. It is also because the perception amongst Unionists was that the Nationalist community are better off being passive and part of the United Kingdom than succeeding in their political goal and achieving a united Ireland. The economy (with UK assistance) was perceived as significantly stronger than that of the Republic of Ireland and for that reason passivity was viewed by Unionists as a dominant strategy for Nationalists, such that any attempt at pursuing peace by Nationalists would not have been viewed as entailing sacrifice and worthy of positive reciprocation.

By the 1990's the economic fortunes of north and south had converged and the idea of a united Ireland, at least in terms of economic prosperity, no longer seemed so far-fetched. In this atmosphere, combined with general war-weariness, mutual peace became possible. The Belfast Agreement combined sacrifice on both sides. The IRA represented by Sinn Fein gave up their claim to a united Ireland and decommissioned weapons. The Unionist community (including ex-loyalist paramilitaries) agreed to share power with Nationalists and allow for a role for the Irish government in matters relating to Northern Ireland. Sectarian hatred had not (and still has not) disappeared from Northern Ireland, but the constituency of support for violence had shrivelled on both sides to allow for mutual peace. Restraint on one side has been matched by restraint on the other side in a way which would have been inconceivable at the height of the conflict. Clearly readers may have

other conflicts in mind, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. In terms of the model presented in this paper, the tragedy there is that both sides have not found a way to move beyond Case 1 with only mutual aggression as an equilibrium. There is still significant constituencies of support for violence on both sides to sustain the violence. Perhaps one reason, in addition to ‘bad is stronger than good’ is that displays of passivity by the Palestinians are not viewed as entailing any sacrifice by Israelis, and therefore a key condition for positive reciprocity is unable to emerge.

4 Conclusion

Section 3 finished in an optimistic (if guarded) fashion. When it is the case that the weak group is actually making material sacrifices to choose passivity in response to passivity by the strong group then mutual peace may emerge as a fairness equilibrium. But the main inspiration for this paper was more to rationalise emotional conflict than to rationalise emotional peace. So where we observe mutual conflict of the sort exhibited in this paper, what has been the cause?

If we turn to case 1, the cause is straightforward. Members of the strong group do not see any sacrifice on the part of the weak group members if they were to choose passivity. For that reason, they will choose aggression in response to passivity as it maximises their material payoff. If the weak group were purely materially motivated (pass, agg) would be the Nash equilibrium of the game. However, because weak group members (having discounted their likelihood of being decisive) may be angered by the aggression shown by the strong group they may emotionally choose aggression in response. Clearly, aggression would then be the materially and emotionally best response by the strong group and thus emotional conflict can emerge. There are two outcomes that are Pareto superior to (agg, agg), namely (pass, agg) and (pass, pass). The latter suffers from the familiar public good type problem that it is a dominated strategy for the strong group and thus it is individually rational for strong group members to choose aggression. Although the reason for (pass, pass) not being an equilibrium in case 1 is clear

enough it does beg the question explored by Fearon (1995) as to why an outcome which would maximise social surplus cannot be reached. He provides three main reasons; 1) asymmetric information; 2) commitment problems and 3) issue indivisibilities. This paper does not dig deeply into why an inefficient outcome is allowed to persist, but in the context of this paper both commitment problems and issue indivisibilities would be relevant. The innovation in this paper is to argue that emotions are required in addition to these problems to generate mutual aggression, otherwise the outcome would be the peaceful (though inefficient) dictatorship by the strong group. The (agg, agg) outcome is driven by emotions of the kind explored by Rabin, but the explanation for why they feature heavily in this paper is not that the stakes are small, but rather that the stakes are made to seem small due to mass collective action rendering individuals largely non-decisive in determining political outcomes.

Case 2 is clearly more hopeful, but an (agg, agg) outcome is still a fairness equilibrium. This case opens issues in the study of conflict for which this paper might provide some insight. In case 1, ultimately the reason there is conflict is that from the perspective of the strong group passivity displayed by the weak group provides them with no positive utility through reciprocation. If the weak group could be viewed as making a sacrifice then those that seek peace within the strong group would have something to work with when seeking support. So in a richer model with incomplete information, it would be interesting to explore the idea that the true state of payoffs for the weak group is unknown to the strong group. If the strong group holds that on observing passivity by the weak group that the weak group is playing its dominant strategy, an emotionally charged weak group may ensure that these beliefs are held out-of-equilibrium as they would only choose aggression anticipating aggression by the strong group.¹⁰ To that extent, it shifts the attention from focussing on why the weak group takes actions that clearly seems against their material interest to the way in which group interaction is perceived within the strong group. If it is the case that the weak group really can make sacrifices it is important for the prospects

¹⁰For a similar idea see Glaesar (2005).

for peace that members of the strong group can come to believe this and that they can enjoy utility from positive reciprocity just as they can enjoy hurting the other group if they feel it is hurting them. If they do, mutual peace becomes a possibility if political interaction is treated as emotional as well as material in nature.

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