

Humiliation and International Conflict: A Mathematical Analysis of ‘Soft Debt’

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Abstract

In this paper I build a behavioural rationalist model of war by allowing a country's citizens to feel humiliated by another's. There are two main findings which run against conventional beliefs but are confirmed by some historical examples. First, when a stronger state needs to decide whether to humiliate a weaker state or not, the higher the weaker state's cost to fighting, the less attractive humiliation to the stronger state is. Second, if we assume that governments cannot control perfectly whether other states feel humiliated by them or not, then it is possible that the higher the number of the humiliated states in the world, the less prevalent wars will be.