

Political Development & Policy



Lecture 2: Why we fight and the path to peace (Part I)

Chris Blattman

Any questions about the class, the assignments, grading, office hours?

Last time

- What do we mean when we talk about “political development”?
 - Function
 - The capabilities approach: “Development as freedom”
 - Order and stability
 - Equality
 - Autonomy
 - Collective action and coordination
 - Form
 - State: Centralized, rule-governed, depersonalized authority who monopolizes violence & shapes society
 - Rule of law: Equal treatment under the law, including for leaders
 - Democracy: Free participation, representation in decision-making, & accountability of leaders
- Why is political development important?
 - Many of these capabilities and freedoms are intrinsically important ends in themselves
 - Some forms of political development also promote economic development, which itself promotes other capabilities and freedoms

Today and next two classes

- A slight detour: Anti-politics machines
- Mostly: Why is there war and peace?

First, a detour: Anti-politics machines

The most common mistake outsiders make



NREGA National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

You have the
RIGHT TO WORK!



Under EGA, you have the right to
100 days employment
in a year, for each family
within 5 km of your residence
within 15 days from application
on local development project

You will find more information in the (NREGA background)
or at your Gram Panchayat.

A very different example: James Ferguson in Lesotho



Cows will teach us an awful lot about politics in this class



“The anti-politics machine”

- Solving poverty and implementing programs is as technical problem, not a social and political problem
- Development projects are apolitical machines that exist to provide social services
- Cliques, factions, inefficiencies, and corruption are seen as impediments rather than strategic reactions to the environment
- Partisan and interested aid interventions are disguised as impartial and disinterested



When are we more likely to behave like
anti-politics machines?

“Peaceland”: an anthropology of aid workers.

Argues that expatriate peacebuilders are anti-politics machines

“Why do some ways of working persist when ineffective?”

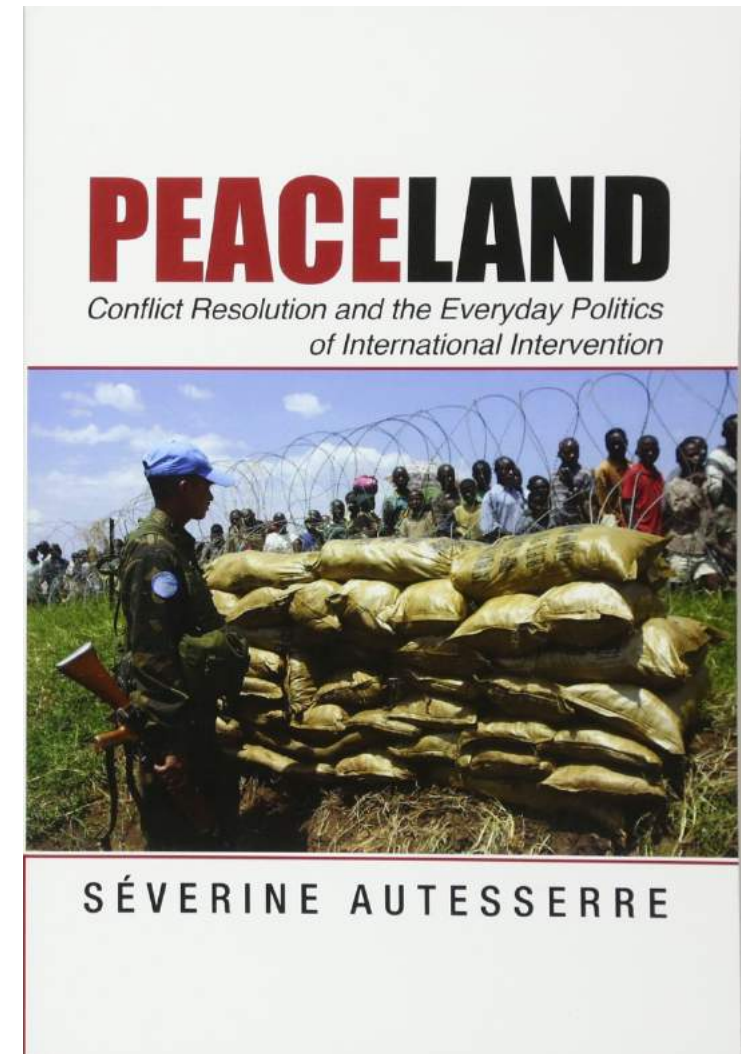
It is not callousness or stupidity or evil

Many political economy reasons that bad policy persists

But she points to underappreciated one: Development workers inhabit a different social space, have a different language, have different systems of belief and motivation, and have biased ways of collecting information.

Can this lead them to draw erroneous inferences or apply erroneous solutions?

Question: Do you think elites or bureaucrats from that country are any different? Why or why not?



Rest of today + next two classes:
The reasons for wars

What I aim to cover today

- Conflict is costly in social, economic and political terms
- That is why competing groups usually find a peaceful bargain. War is the exception not the rule.
 - Rather than thinking of violence as natural, fighting is what happens when peaceful bargains break down
- There are 5 main kinds of reasons why bargains break down, which I call:
 1. Unchecked elites
 2. Violent preferences
 3. Systematic mistakes
 4. Uncertainty
 5. Impossible bargains (Commitment problems)
- Most conflicts can be understood in terms of these 5 reasons, and most solutions to conflict are solutions to at least one of these five problems

I. War as costly, violent bargaining

Example 1: Recent Indo-Pakistan confrontation



NEWS / INDIA

Pakistan soldiers killed in fresh clashes on India border

At least three soldiers killed, one wounded in exchange of fire in disputed Kashmir region, Pakistan's military says.

7 hours ago  



There has been a tenuous ceasefire in place at the LoC since 2003 [File: EPA]

At least three Pakistani soldiers have been killed when [India](#) and Pakistan exchanged fire across the Line of Control in the disputed region of [Kashmir](#), Pakistan's military said, in the latest round of hostilities between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

MORE ON PAKISTAN

Facebook removes dozens of Indian, Pakistani pages today

Pakistan hikes fuel prices

Example 2: *El Pacto de Fusil* Medellin and the “Pact of the Machine Gun”



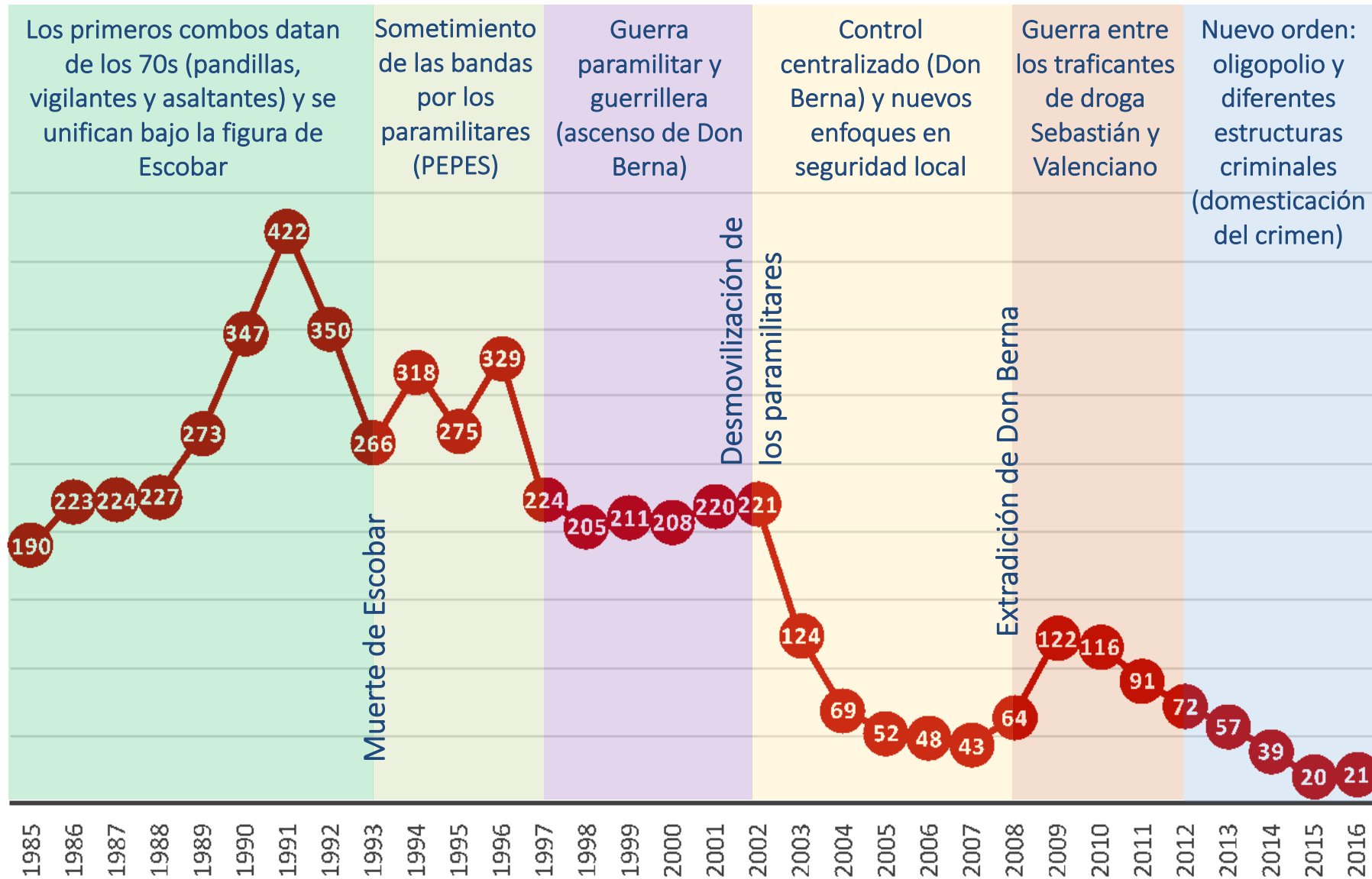
The story of the “Billiards War”

Bellavista prison in Medellin



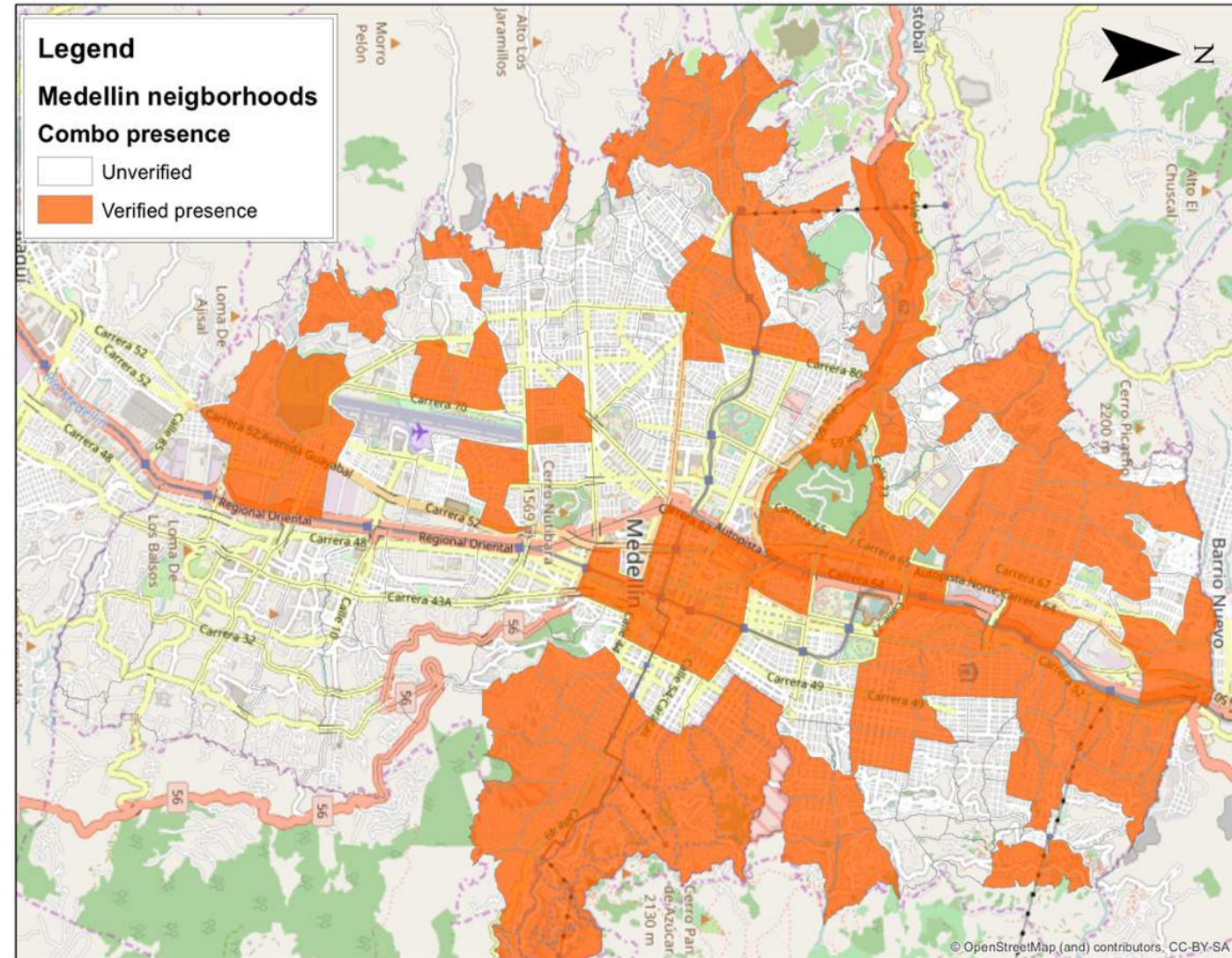
There is little warfare today between Medellín's "combos" (street gangs)

Evolution of the homicide rate in Medellín



This is surprising, because you would think hundreds of neighboring combos would be a recipe for incessant warfare

- Many roving bandits
- Even if some are stationary bandits, they have incentives to take over neighboring territory
- Looks like the same situation of anarchy as the global state system throughout history
- And lots of hotheaded young men and “billiards wars”

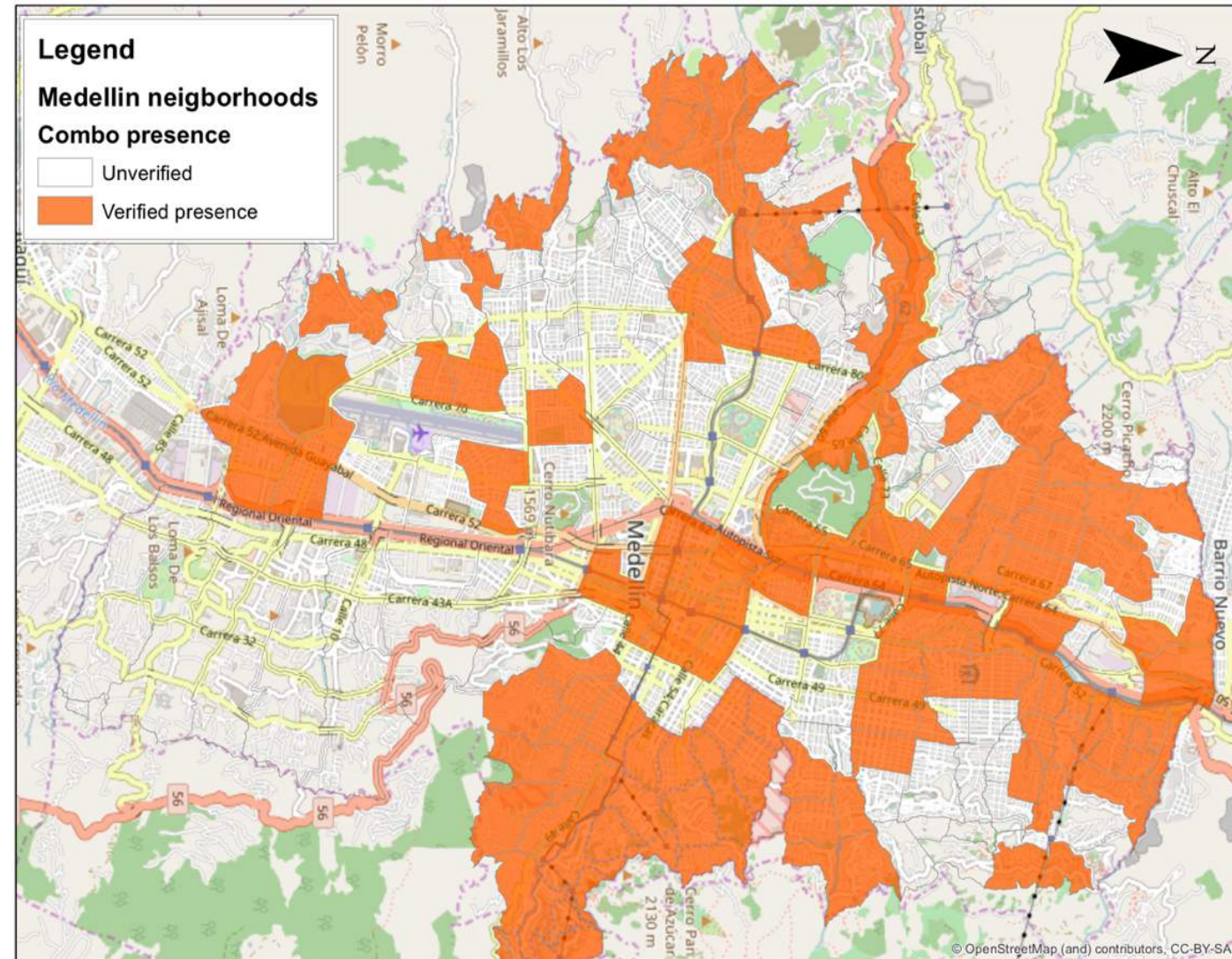


What kinds of forces push towards gang wars?
What forces push against?



Combos have some incentives for peace

- The problems with war:
 - Your soldiers get killed
 - Customers for your drugs, consumer goods stay away
 - You have to spend a lot of time and money arming and defending your territory
 - Police nose around
- What you would like to do is negotiate peacefully much of the time
- But this is hard to do in a system of anarchy



Both examples point to a similar insight: War is the exception, peace is the rule

- Some commonplace views:
 - War is the “natural state of humankind”
 - Ethnic violence and active conflict are ubiquitous
 - Hostile rivals are destined to fight
- However, there are millions of competitive, hostile, even hateful rivalries in the world. Most of them don't lead to large-scale, sustained violence between groups (war)
- Rivals frequently skirmish violently. Most of the time, however, they manage to find arrangements to avoid war

A rare quantitative example: Violence in Africa, 1979-94

TABLE 1. Estimates of Actual and Potential Communal Violence in Africa, Independence through 1979

Type of Communal Violence	Number of Incidents for All Years and Countries ^a	Country Mean of Incidents per Year ^b	Number of Potential Incidents for All Countries and Years ^c	Country Mean of Potential Incidents per Year ^d	Ratio of All Actual Incidents to All Potential Incidents ^e
Ethnic violence	20	.03	38,383	58.86	.0005
Irredentism	29	.04	18,757	26	.0015
Rebellion	27	.04	18,757	26	.0014
Civil war	52	.10	18,757	26	.0028



Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation." *The American Political Science Review* 90 (1996): 715–35.

Asking why there is war is really asking why the normal peaceful deals don't get made. Most rivals deal rather than fight.



“War is the continuation of politics by other means.”

— Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832

Asking why there is war is really asking why the normal peaceful deals don't get made. Most rivals deal rather than fight.

- Fighting is violent bargaining
- We will see how fighting is typically costlier than finding a deal
 - Thus there is almost always a peaceful bargain that leaves both sides better off
 - Enemies find ways to compete and negotiate peacefully (even if cutthroat and dirty)
- Instead of asking “what causes fighting?” we ought to ask a slightly different question: “when do enemies switch modes, choosing costly violence over cutting a deal?”



“War is the continuation of politics by other means.”

— Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832

This means it is equally important to study the wars that never were

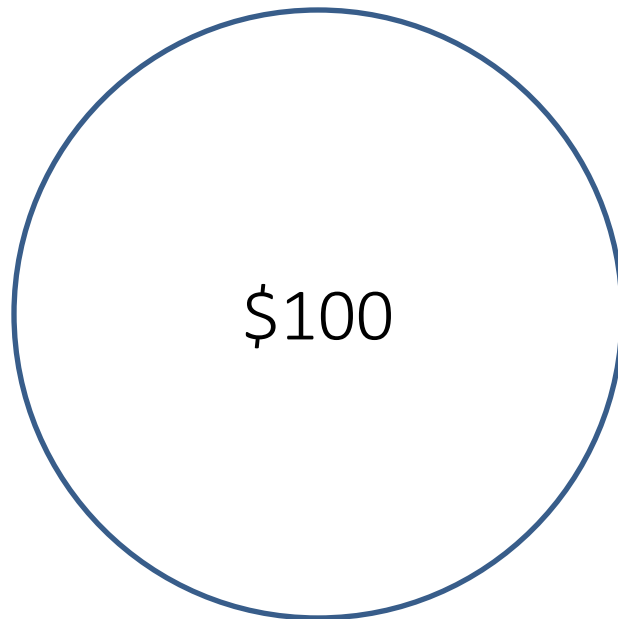
- Many studies of wars trace back the history of a conflict to find its “root causes”
- This is a classic error: Selection on the dependent variable
 - Probably leads to getting the causes of war wrong

Question: What approach (or research design) would improve our ability to understand the causes of war?

But let me illustrate logic behind the claim that “there is almost always a peaceful bargain that leaves both sides better off” (adapted from Fearon 1995)

Imagine there are two sides we call **Athens** and **Sparta**.

They are fighting for a pie worth \$100. If there is a war, the winner gets $X = \$100$, the loser \$0.



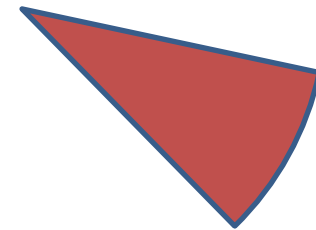
Suppose Athens believes that it and Sparta are evenly matched.

Thus Athens has a $p=50\%$ chance of winning a conflict.

But war would cost it $C=\$10$.

What Athens expects to get if it wins (50% chance): $\$100-10=\90

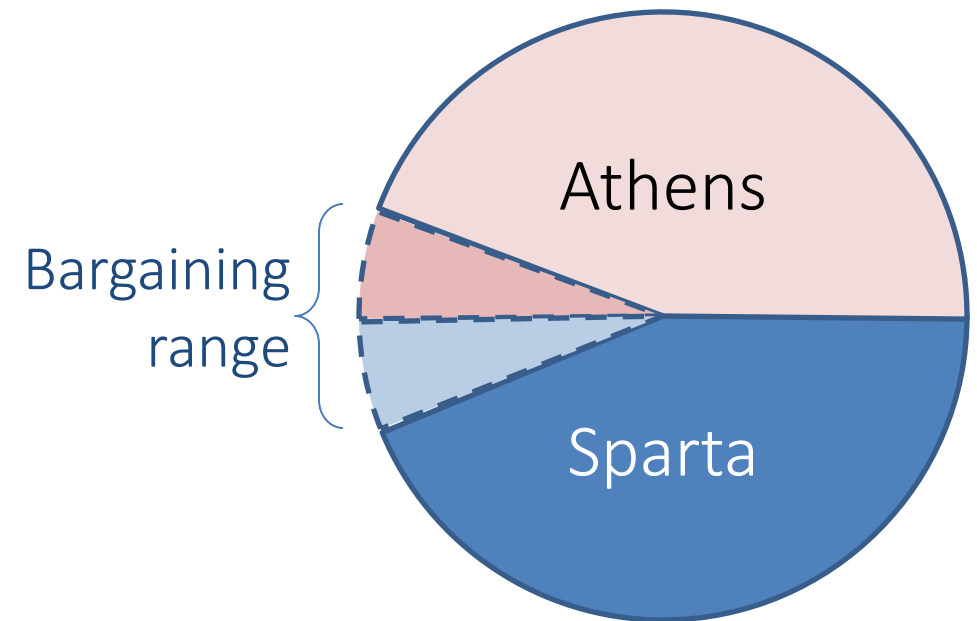
What Athens gets if it loses (50% chance): $\$0-\$10=-\$10$



What is the expected value of war to Athens?

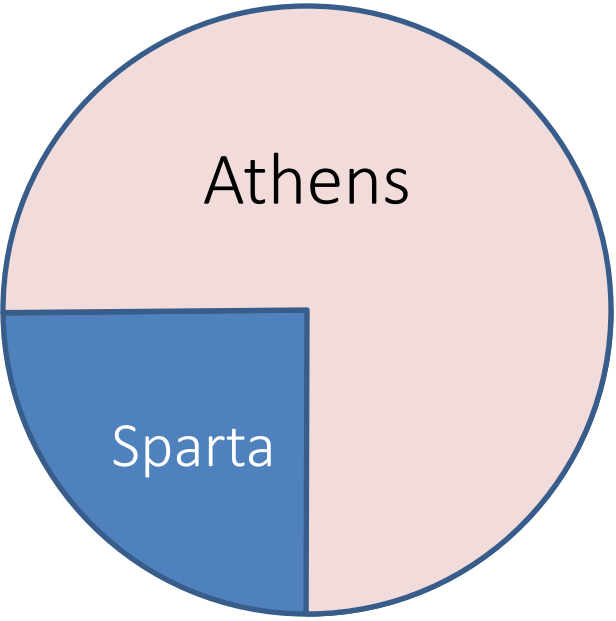
The incentives for peace and the bargaining range

- This implies that Athens would find any split greater than \$40 preferable to war
- The \$10 cost to each side creates a **bargaining range** that is $\$10 + \$10 = \$20$ wide
- This is a version of the “Coase theorem”: there are incentives for a peaceful bargain
 - If Athens can make Sparta a take-it-or-leave-it offer, where the alternative is war, then Sparta will always accept any offer $x > \$40$ rather than war
 - If they negotiate over multiple rounds, both prefer any Spartan share x in the bargaining range $\$40 < x < \60 to war, and will find an x peacefully
 - The actual split x then depends on the rules and first mover



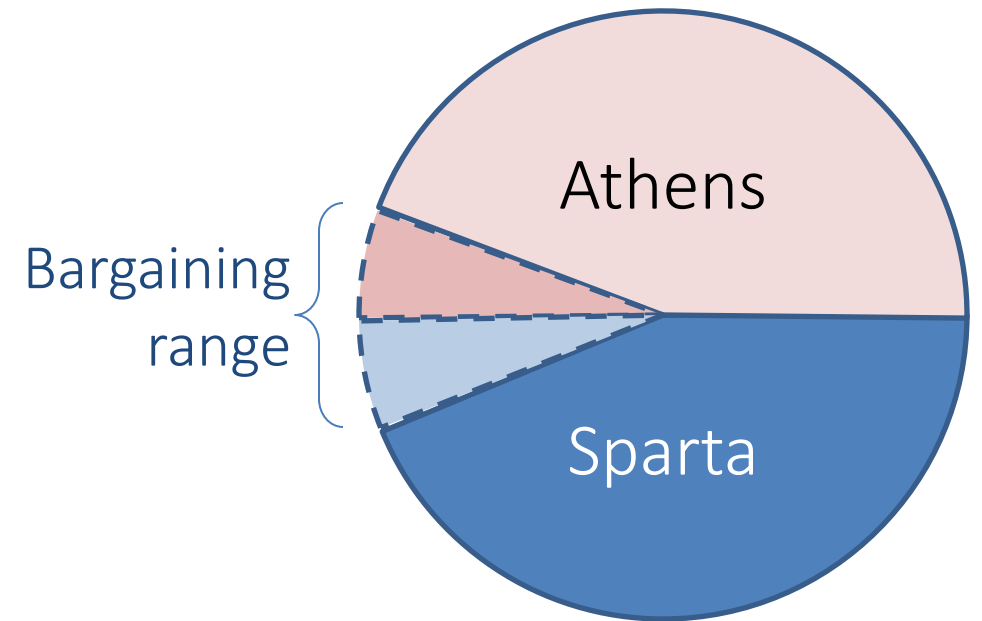
Here, it is crucial that war is costly.
But in what sense is war costly, and for
whom?

Now, suppose Athens still has a 50% chance of winning a conflict ($p=0.5$), but it begins holding \$75 of the territory. Do you predict war? Why or why not?



Do you find this a plausible description of the incentives facing human groups? Why or why not?

- Empirically do you observe something different in the world?
- What assumptions in this simple setup strike you as implausible?



II. The reasons for wars

Why Men Love War

"Like all lust, for as long as it lasts it dominates everything else." *Read this legendary story again for Memorial Day.*

E BY WILLIAM BROYLES, JR. MAY 23, 2014



PATRICK CHRISTAIN/GETTY IMAGES

Originally published in the November 1984 issue

I last saw Hiers in a rice paddy in Vietnam. He was nineteen then--my wonderfully skilled and maddeningly insubordinate radio operator. For months we were seldom more than three feet apart. Then one day he went home, and fifteen years passed before we met by accident last winter at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in

One view:

“There is a reason for every war and a war for every reason.”

My view: True, but there are only so many *kinds* of reasons

- We need to step back and simplify what seems like a complex mess of causes
- Once you do, you realize there are only a handful of explanations for war.
- Each one can be seen as a departure from the simple assumptions that lead to the peaceful bargain in the previous example
- My argument in this class: **Most explanations for most conflicts are one of five types of departure from the assumptions**

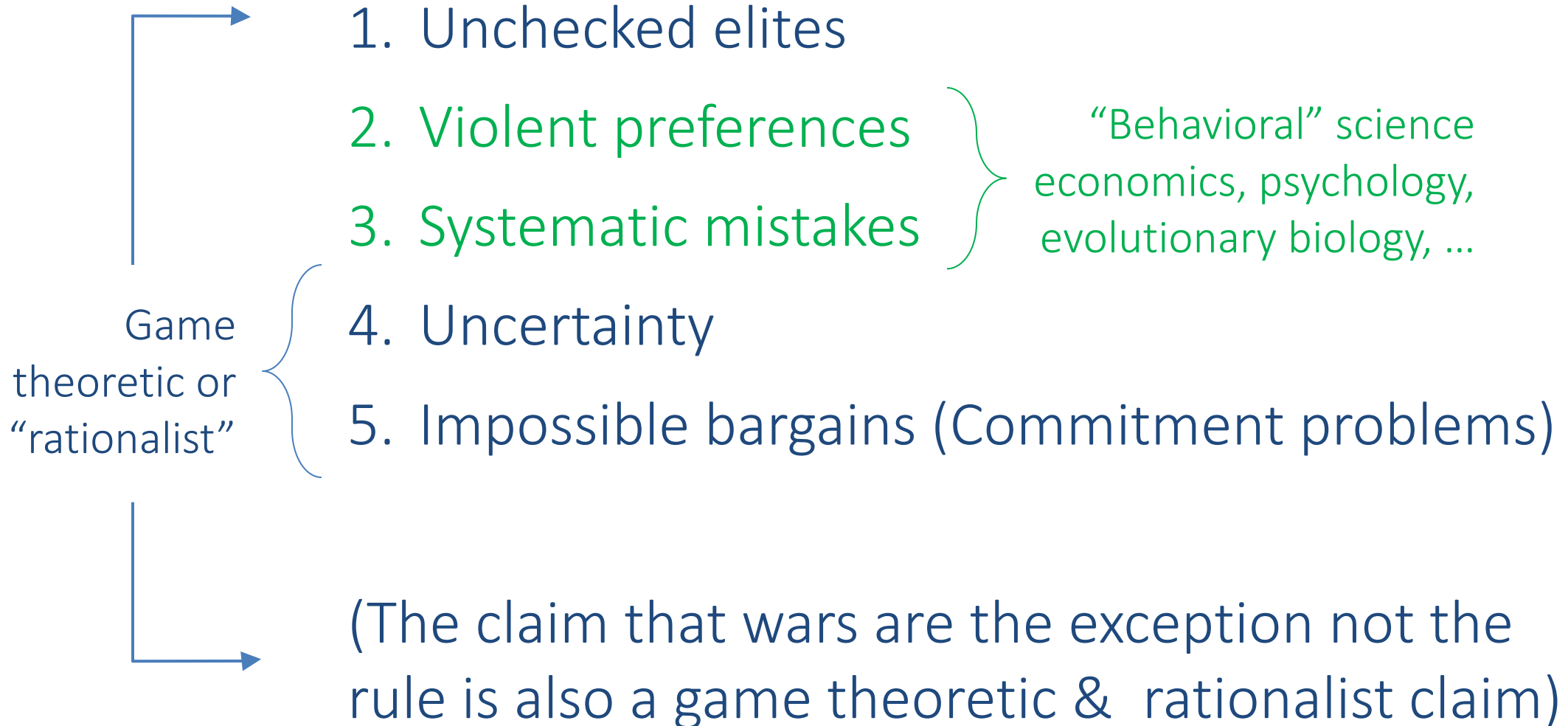
Almost every explanation for fighting boils down to one of five kinds of problem

1. **Unchecked elites.** Groups are more likely to fight when decision-makers ignore the costs of war or receive personal benefits (and no one holds them to account)
2. **Violent values.** Sometimes the act of violence is its own reward, in terms of status, emotion, or principle. These are non-material incentives for war
3. **Systematic mistakes.** Competition is a complex set of decisions, and humans tend to systematic mistakes when evaluating costs or chances of victory
4. **Uncertainty.** When the opposing group's strength or intentions are ambiguous, taking a chance by fighting can be the best way to resolve the uncertainty, so that war is the result of a risky gamble
5. **Impossible bargains / Commitment problems.** Some circumstances give one side an irresistible incentive to risk war. Even if there is a peaceful deal that makes both sides better off, that deal is non-credible, as at least once side has incentives to renege

With this framework, I try to to bring together game-theoretic and more “behavioral” or psychological explanations for war

1. Unchecked elites
2. Violent preferences
3. Systematic mistakes
4. Uncertainty
5. Impossible bargains (Commitment problems)

With this framework, I try to to bring together game-theoretic and more “behavioral” or psychological explanations for war



Almost all of these explanations were presaged by 50 years of scholars conflict research

- Journalists seem to favor “greed” and various passions
 - e.g. “Ancient ethnic hatreds”
- Economists & quantitative political scientists have mostly ignored emotions & miscalculation
- Understanding the causes of a conflict is mostly reinterpreting what historians and political scientists say in the five causes (and looking for the things they missed)

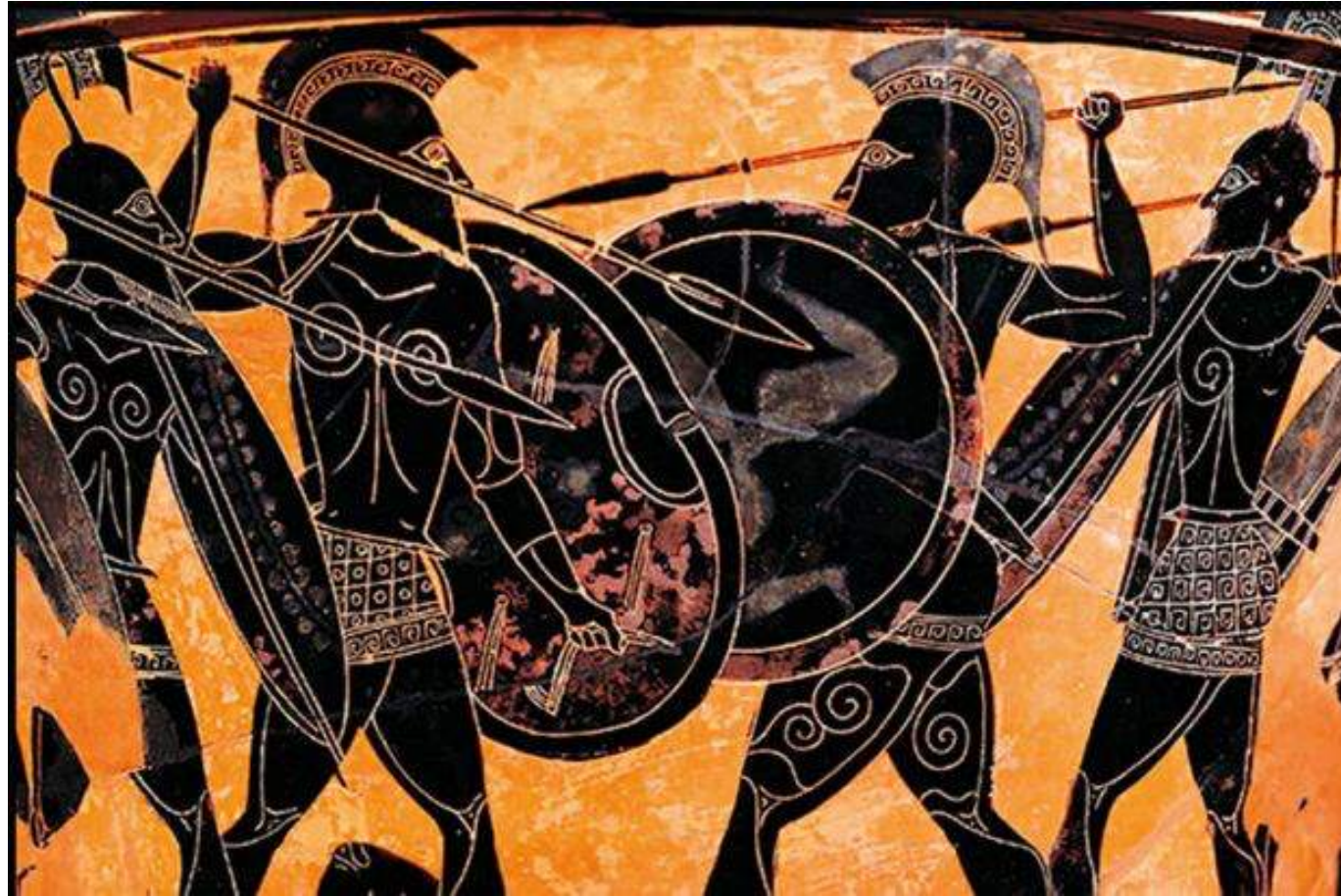
Rationalist explanations for war

James D. Fearon

The central puzzle about war, and also the main reason we study it, is that wars are costly but nonetheless wars recur. Scholars have attempted to resolve the puzzle with three types of argument. **First, one can argue that people (and state leaders in particular) are sometimes or always irrational. They are subject to biases and pathologies that lead them to neglect the costs of war or to misunderstand how their actions will produce it. Second, one can argue that the leaders who order war enjoy its benefits but do not pay the costs, which are suffered by soldiers and citizens. Third, one can argue that even rational leaders who consider the risks and costs of war may end up fighting nonetheless.**

This article focuses on arguments of the third sort, which I will call rationalist explanations.¹ Rationalist explanations abound in the literature on international conflict, assuming a great variety of specific forms. Moreover, for at least two reasons many scholars have given rationalist explanations a certain pride of place. First, historians and political scientists who have studied the origins of particular wars often have concluded that war can be a rational alternative for leaders who are acting in their states’ interest—they find that the expected benefits of war sometimes outweigh the expected costs, however unfortunate

To illustrate, I'll start with a classic example (literally):
Example 3: Greek city states, Athens & Sparta in 4th century B.C.E.



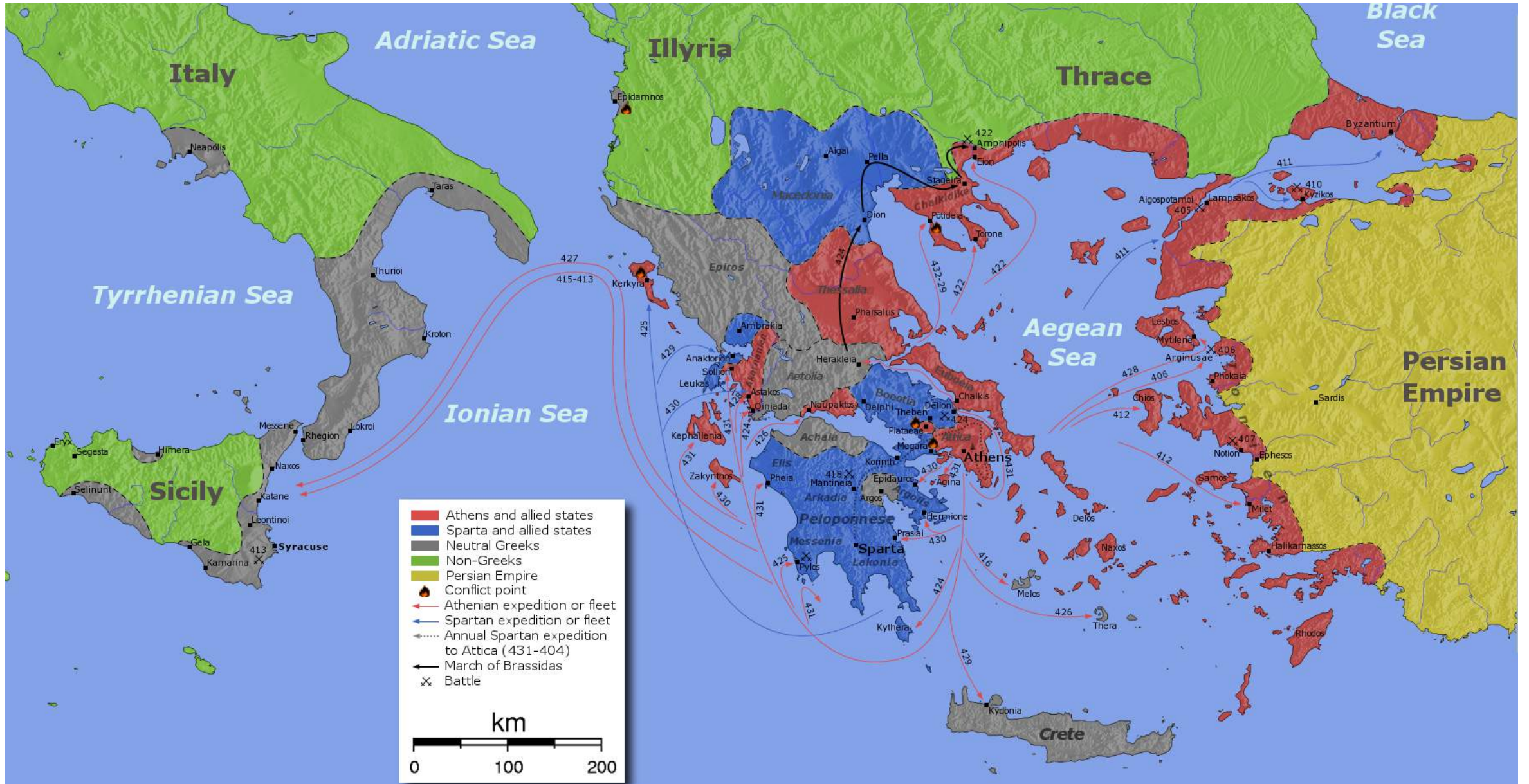
I purposefully start with a war few will know much about so I can illustrate the 5 reasons in an oversimplified way, with an oversimplified version of an important war in world history

Two great powers, representing two vastly different ideals and social organization

- Athens
 - Birthplace of democracy
 - Flourishing center for arts, philosophy, science
 - Builds a vast maritime empire in Aegean Sea, the Delian League, providing security for tribute
- Sparta
 - Ruled by military oligarchs
 - 4 in 5 subjects enslaved as agriculturalists
 - Every male citizen trained from earliest age to be a complete specialist in violence and war
 - Disdain for trades, little infrastructure, no walls because of ideals of fighting prowess
 - Along with its allies it dominates a vast land empire, The Peloponnesian League

In the late 20th century, the rivalry is often compared to the US and USSR

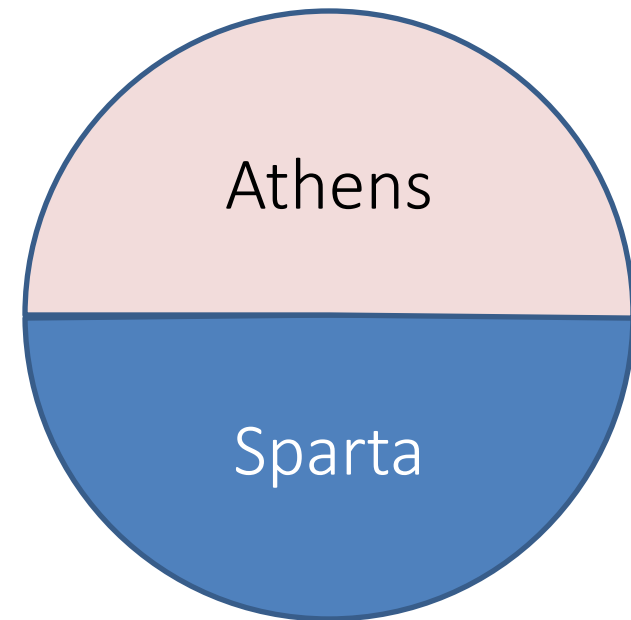
The Greek World, circa 431 B.C.E.



This brings us back to our simple example of incentives for peace

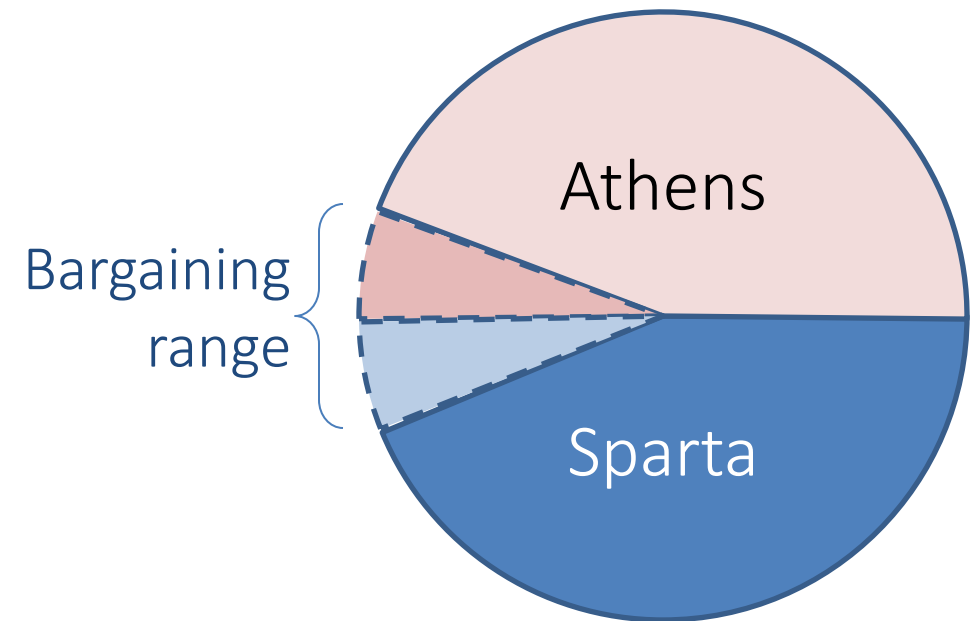
Suppose the Greek world is a pie worth \$100. If there is a war, the winner gets $X = \$100$, the loser \$0.

Here is a possible peaceful split of the pie for equally powerful groups (i.e. $p = 50\%$ chance of winning a war)

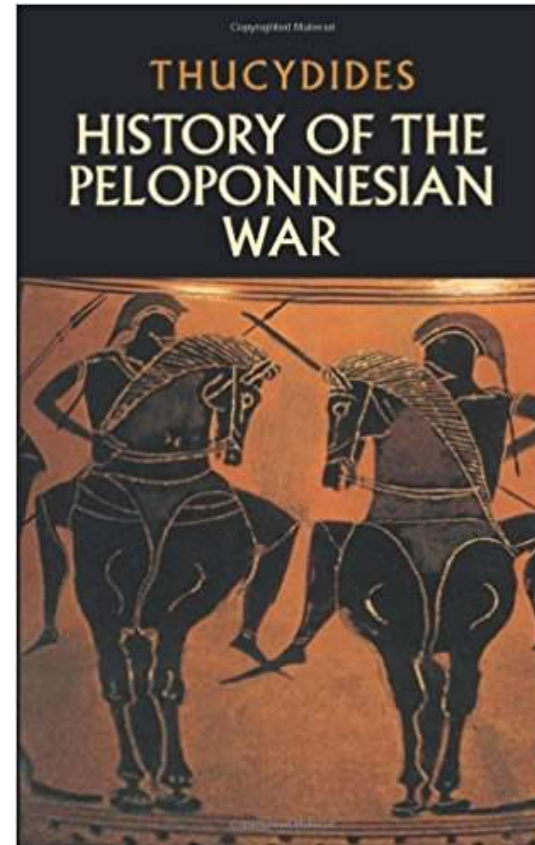
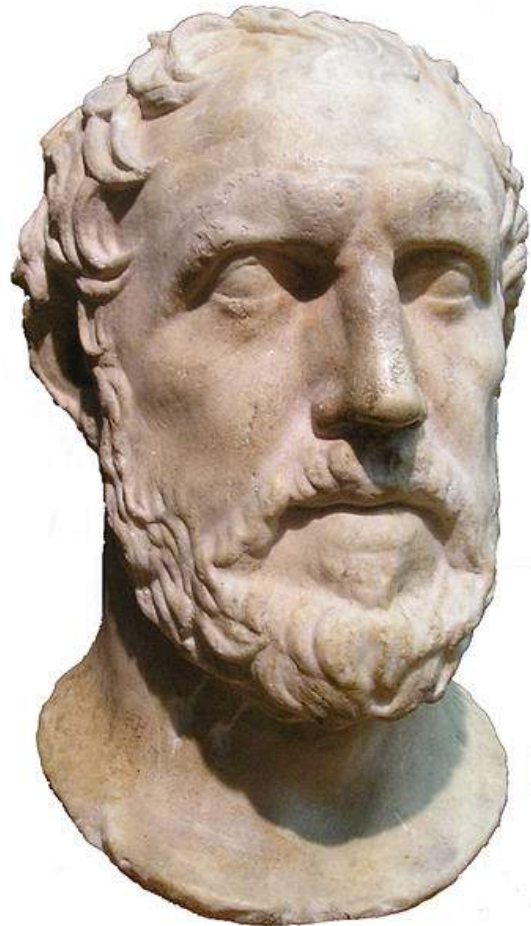


The incentives for peace and the bargaining range

- This implies that Athens would find any split greater than \$40 preferable to war
- The \$10 cost to each side creates a **bargaining range** that is $\$10 + \$10 = \$20$ wide
- Costly war provides incentives for a peaceful bargain
 - If Athens can make Sparta a take-it-or-leave-it offer, where the alternative is war, then Sparta will always accept any offer $x > \$40$ rather than war
 - If they negotiate over multiple rounds, both prefer any Spartan share x in the bargaining range $\$40 < x < \60 to war, and will find an x peacefully
 - The actual split x then depends on the rules and first mover

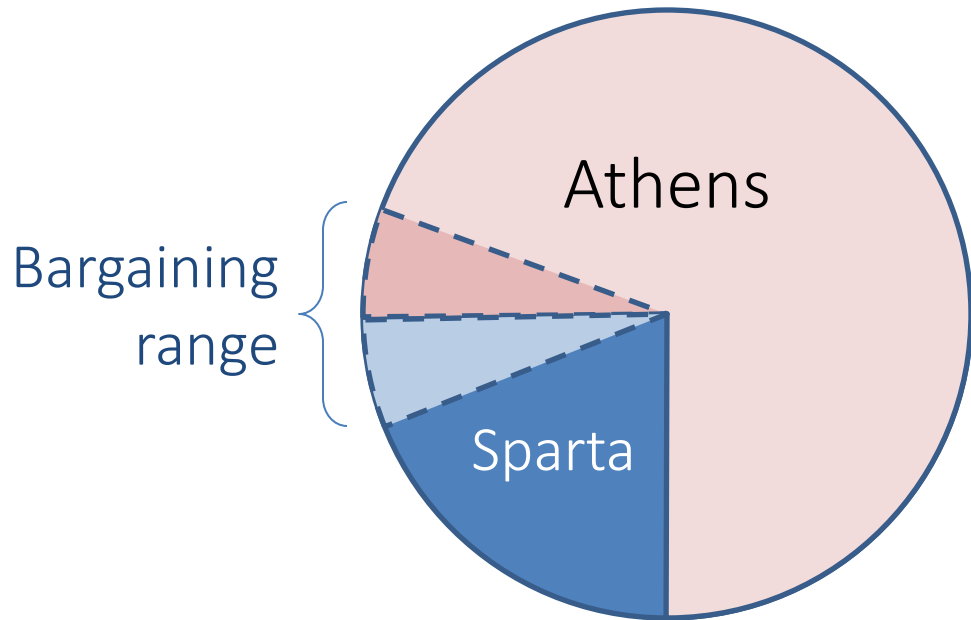


Famed account of the war comes from the historian Thucydides:
“It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta
that made war inevitable.”



So imagine a state of the world where Sparta becomes much weaker, and has only a 25% chance of winning a war. It holds 50% of the territory, however. What do we predict a unitary, rational Sparta to do?

The new bargaining range (if $c = \$10$ still for both)



- For example, the Spartans might be the most advanced at war, but if they send too many troops away, their slave empire revolts
- Or perhaps this is a world where Athens's vast trading empire and tributary system, the Delian League, gives it the wealth to run a long war or the navy to outmatch Sparta
- Either way, Sparta will accept any $\$15 < x < \35 over war in this world
- Sparta will transfer territory or tribute to avoid a war

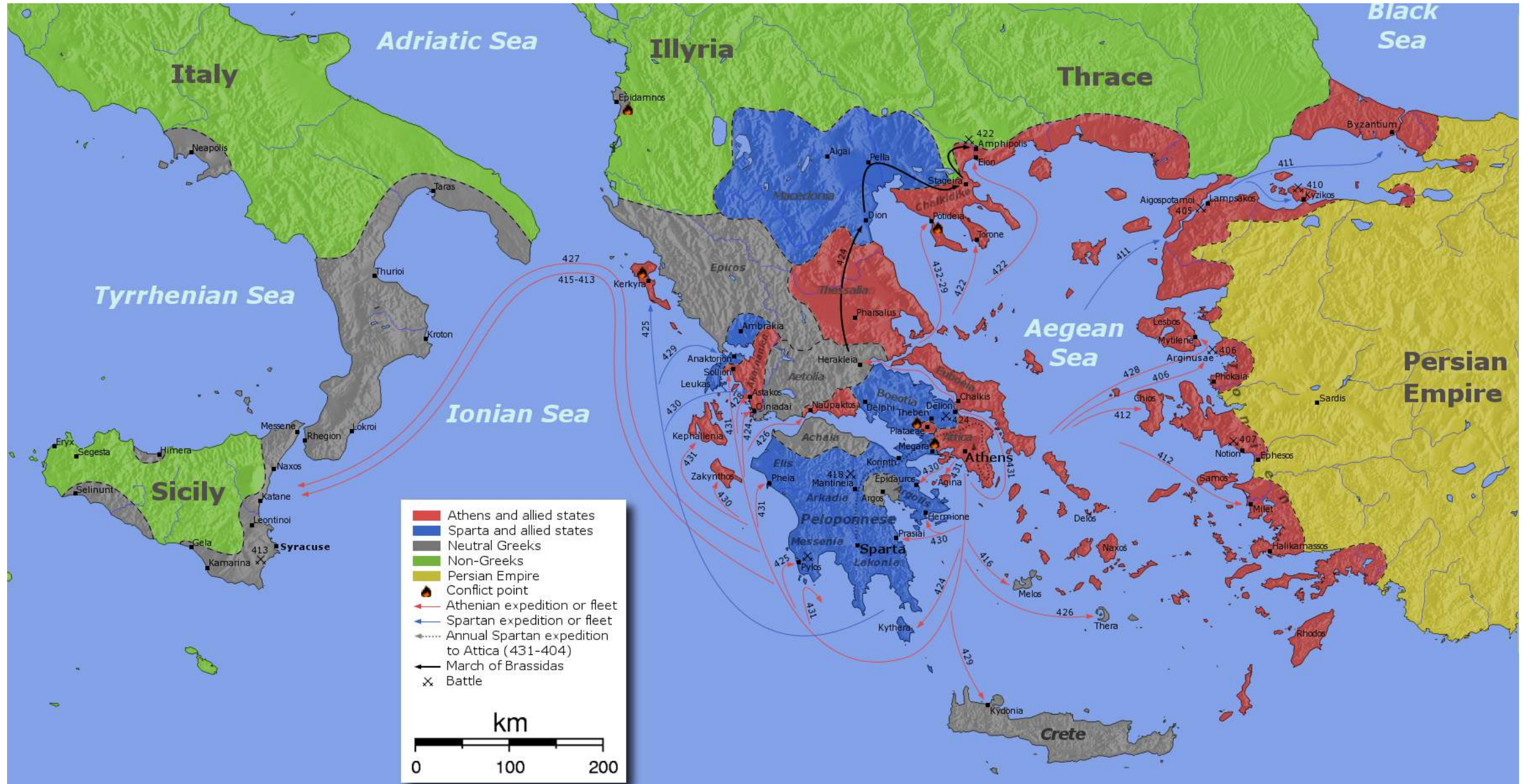
In some ways, this is not a terrible description of the Greek world before the Peloponnesian War

- There are many hostile rivalries among city states, but only some of them are violent
- Alliances like The Delian League (Athens) or The Peloponnesian League (Sparta) are peaceful deals (however unequal)
 - Weaker states transfer tribute to the stronger ones, rather than fight
 - Imperialism and tribute are common alternatives to conflict throughout history
- When they are violent (and there are many wars between Greek city states) these conflicts tend to be of short duration, often decided in single skirmishes or battles
 - There are no long and sustained conflicts

Thus: How to explain the Peloponnesian War?

Also: Can we also explain the need for violent battles so normal among Greek city states? (As it is perhaps unfair to treat these as “skirmishes” and basically peaceful)

But conflict does break out: The Peloponnesian War 431–404 BC



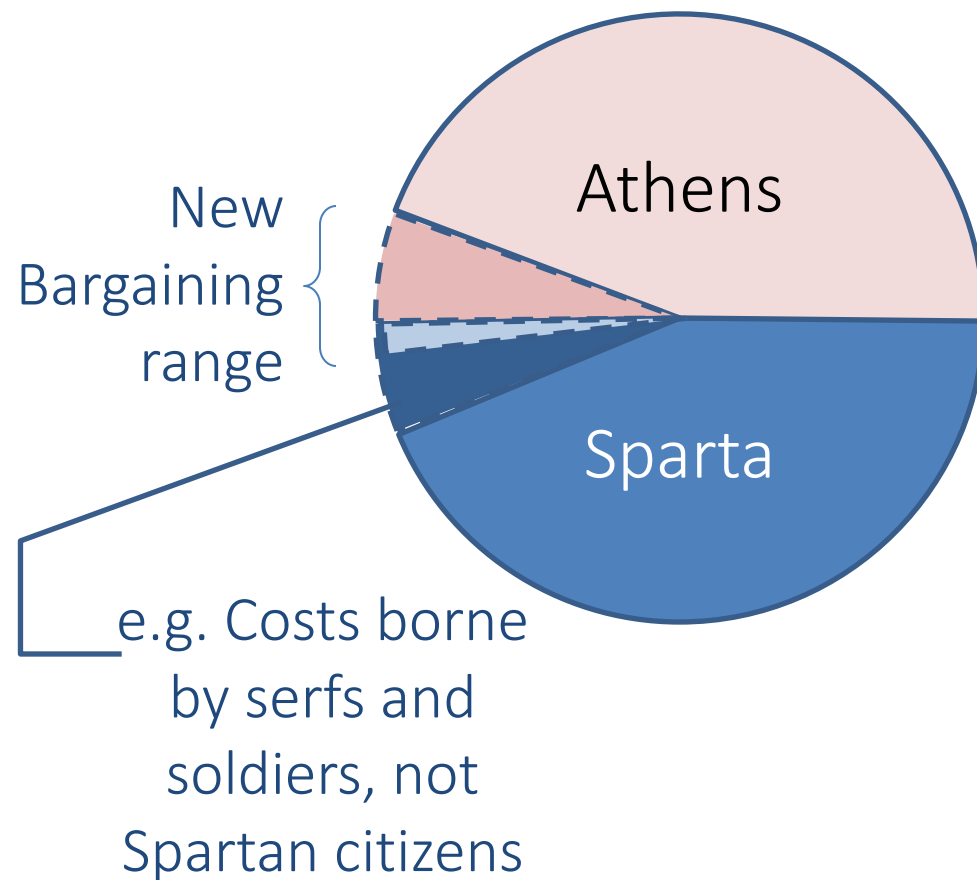
A typology of five explanations

1. **Unchecked elites**
2. Violent preferences
3. Systematic mistakes
4. Uncertainty
5. Impossible bargains (Commitment problems)

What if we relax unitary actor assumption?

If leaders ignore the costs of war, then bargaining range shrinks

- To the extent that leaders ignore costs, this shrinks the bargaining range
 - Sometimes called an “agency problem”
- But if a bargaining range still exists, war still remains a “puzzle”
 - But narrower ranges can accentuate asymmetric information and commitment problems and other causes of war



Under what circumstances could
unchecked leaders alone eliminate
peaceful bargains?

Now, I have not told you much about culture, power, or politics in these Greek city-states, but this is what you get from a Google Image search of...

“Athens”



“Sparta”



What kinds of factors occur to you as possibly making these elites more or less likely to internalize the costs of war?

Why would leaders would act anything but selfishly?

When do rulers internalize the costs of war and solve the agency problem?

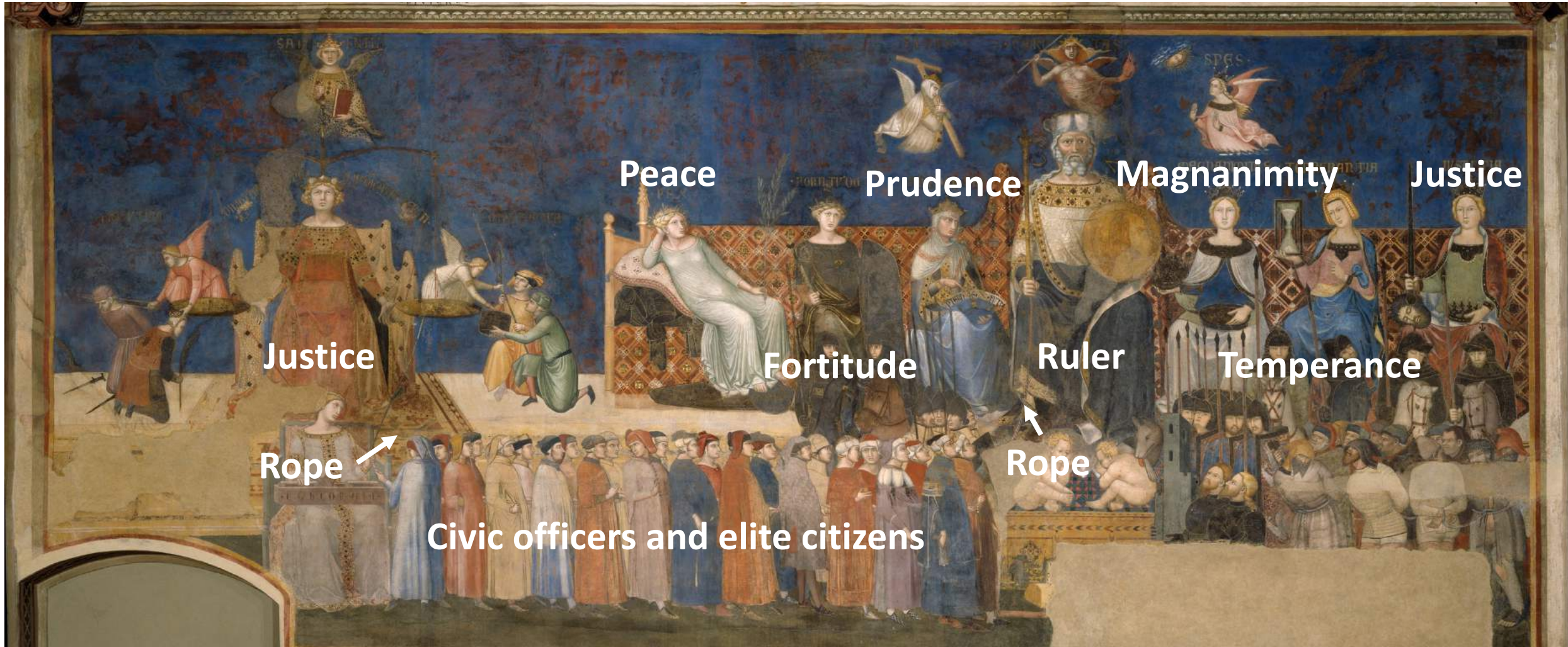
Psychological/behavioral

- Internally-imposed regard for others
 - Your nature, ethics, preferences
- Arises from socialization, culture, genetics
- Humans display “social preferences” such as altruism and reciprocity
- We seem to be biased to our “in group”
 - “Parochial altruism”
 - The definition and width of the in-group matters

Political/institutional

- Externally-imposed regard for others
 - The rules, power, and constraints imposed by others
- A product of how power is distributed in a society, and how it has been institutionalized
- More decentralized, inclusive, professionalized formal systems, and stronger informal systems of norms, tend to restrain leaders

Recall Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (Sienna, Italy, 1338-39): Good rulers are constrained



Why call this reason “unchecked elites” rather than “selfish leaders”? Because self-regard is universal but checks are not. Groups vary mainly in the checks upon, not virtue of, their leaders

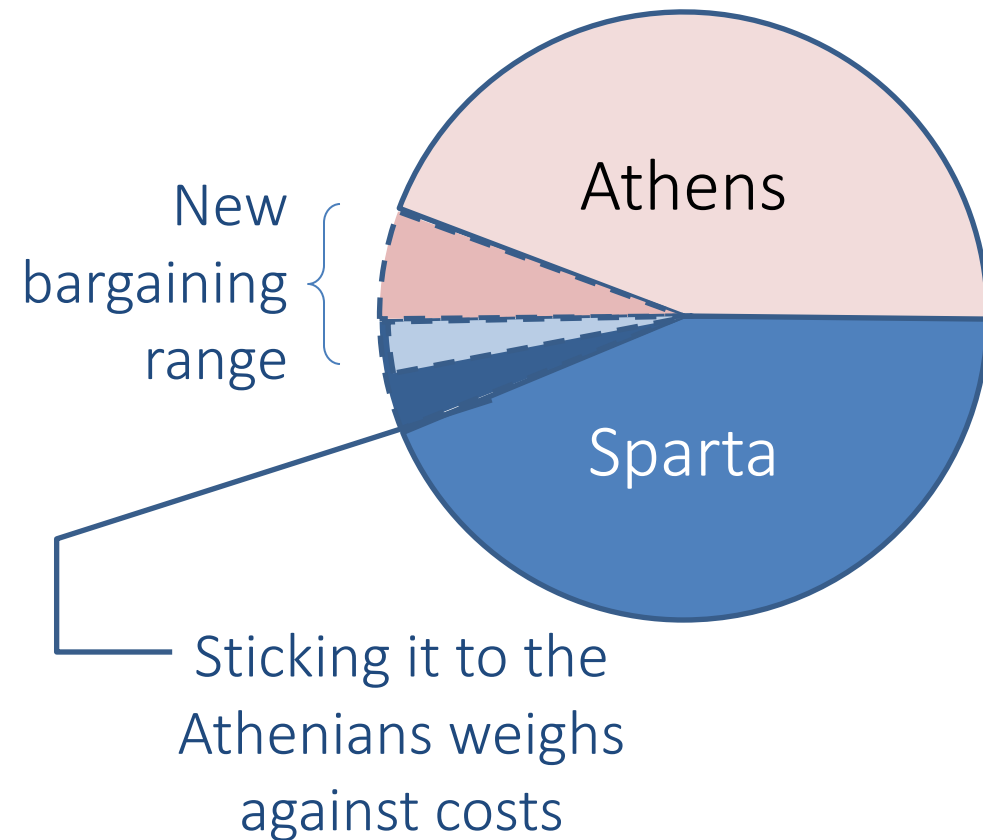


A typology of five explanations

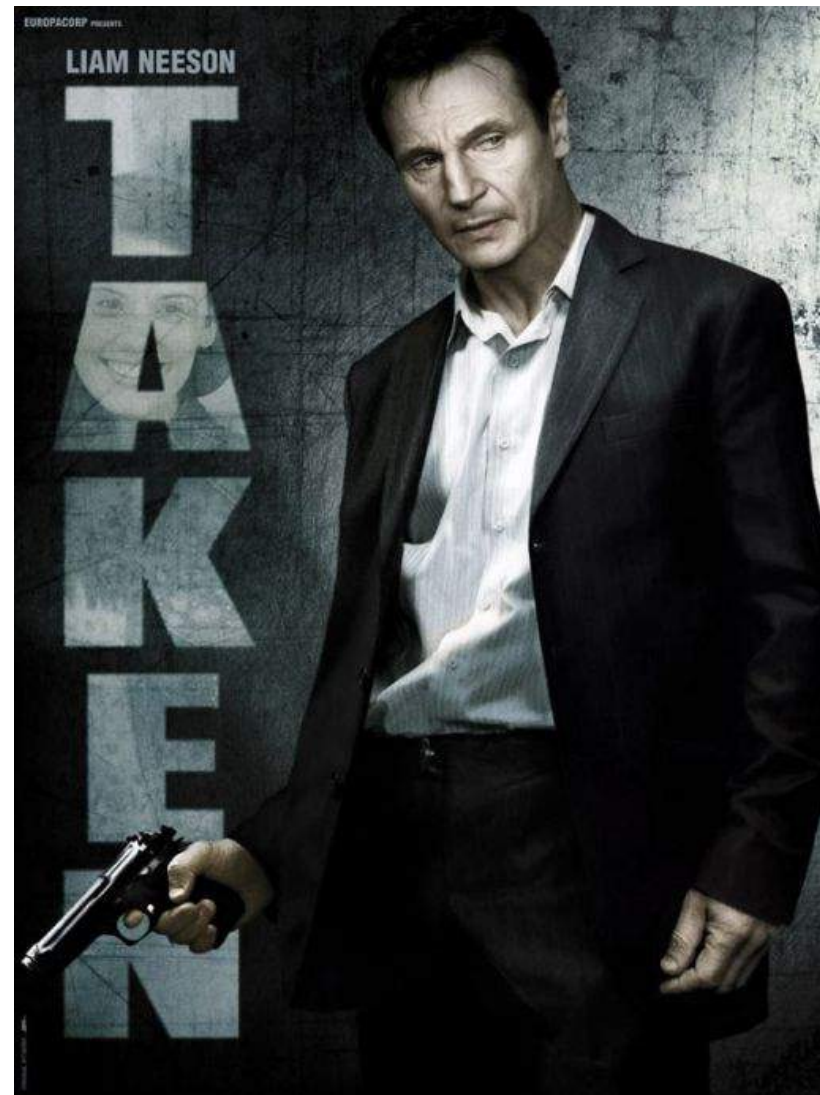
1. Unchecked elites
2. **Violent preferences**
3. Systematic mistakes
4. Uncertainty
5. Impossible bargains (Commitment problems)

There are some circumstances where violence becomes its own reward

- There are many examples of violence as intrinsically valuable – an emotional reward that comes from fighting
 - Moral beliefs or religious values
 - Exterminating false gods or ideologies
 - Vengeance
 - Revenge is intrinsically valued
- Again, narrower bargaining ranges can accentuate the other causes of war
- In the extreme, one side can actually get net benefits from war, so that war is no puzzle



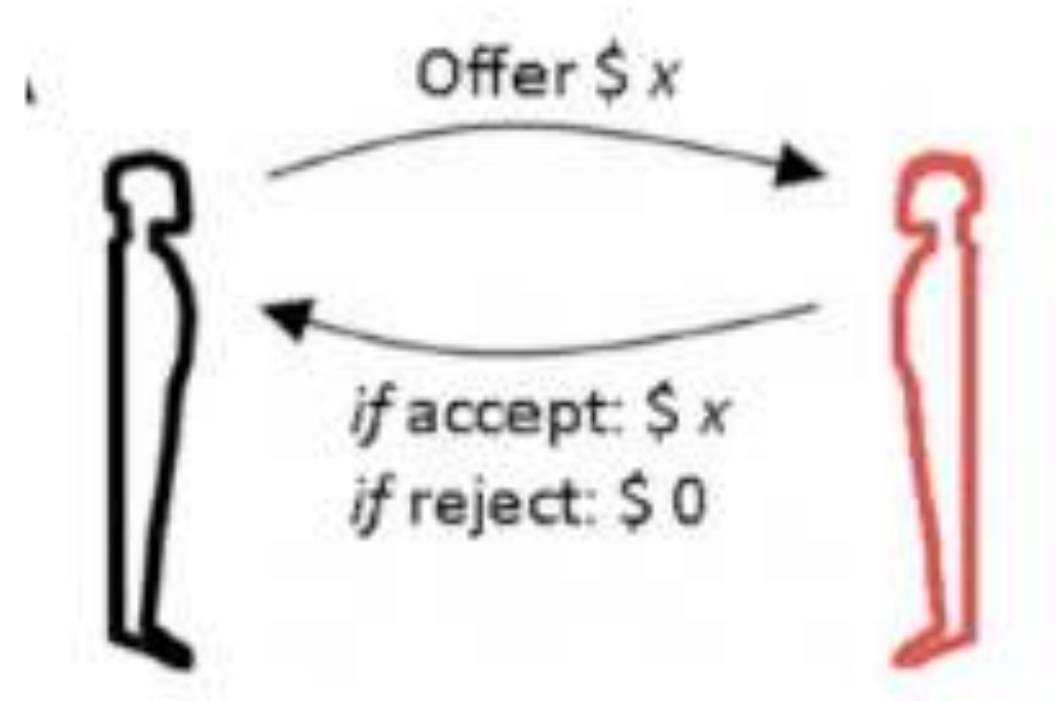
Let's consider vengeance, with a modern digression



Do we have ingrained fairness norms & a willingness to pay to punish injustice?

Evidence from experimental games e.g. Fehr and Gächter 2000

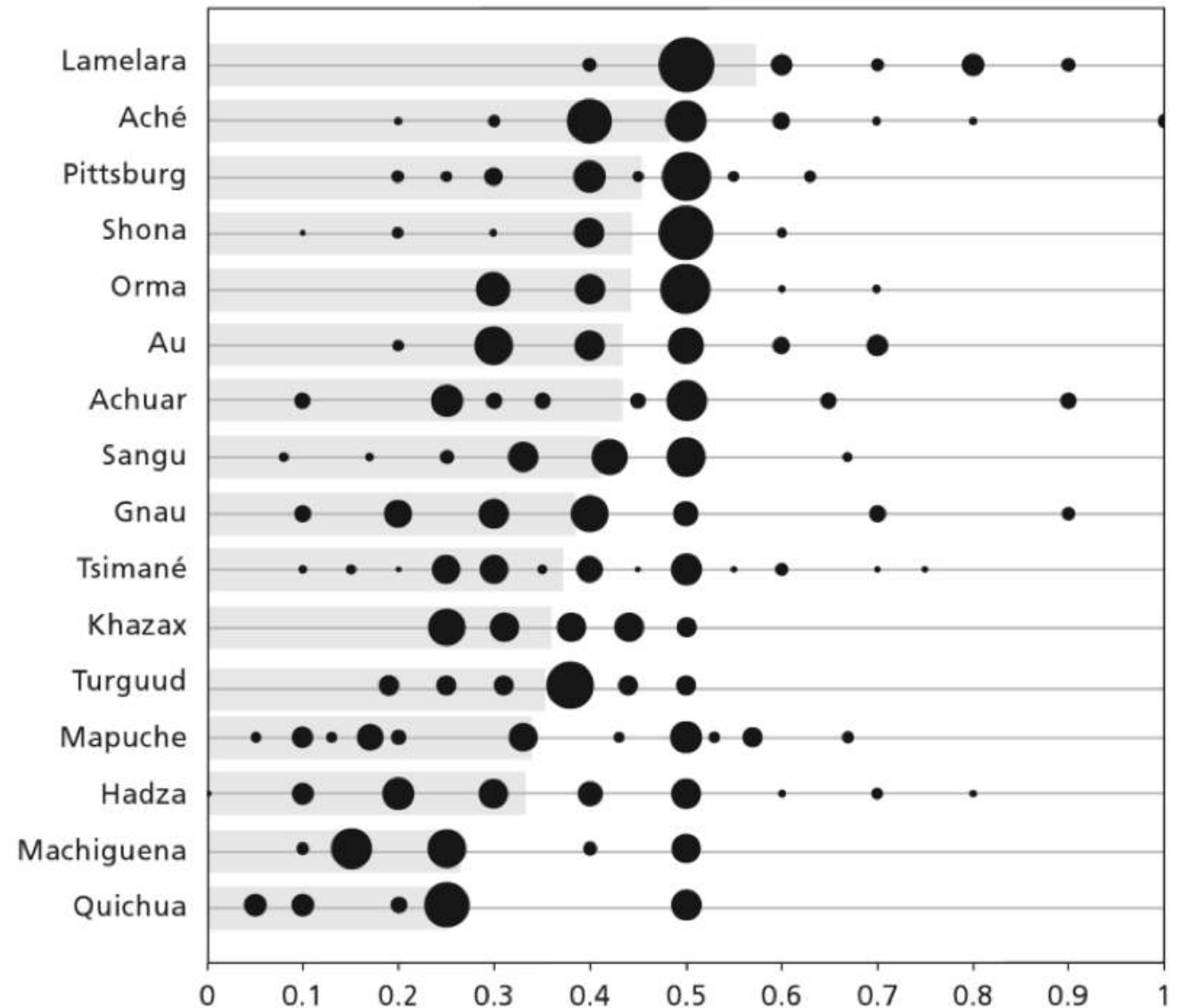
- “Dictator game”
 - Person A get \$X
 - A chooses $X \geq x \geq 0$ to give person B
 - Measures “altruism”
- Ultimatum game
 - Person A get \$X
 - A chooses $X \geq x \geq 0$ to give person B
 - B can choose whether to accept x or reject and both get 0
 - Measures “fairness”



Homo economicus?

Offer from an ultimatum game in 15 small scale-societies

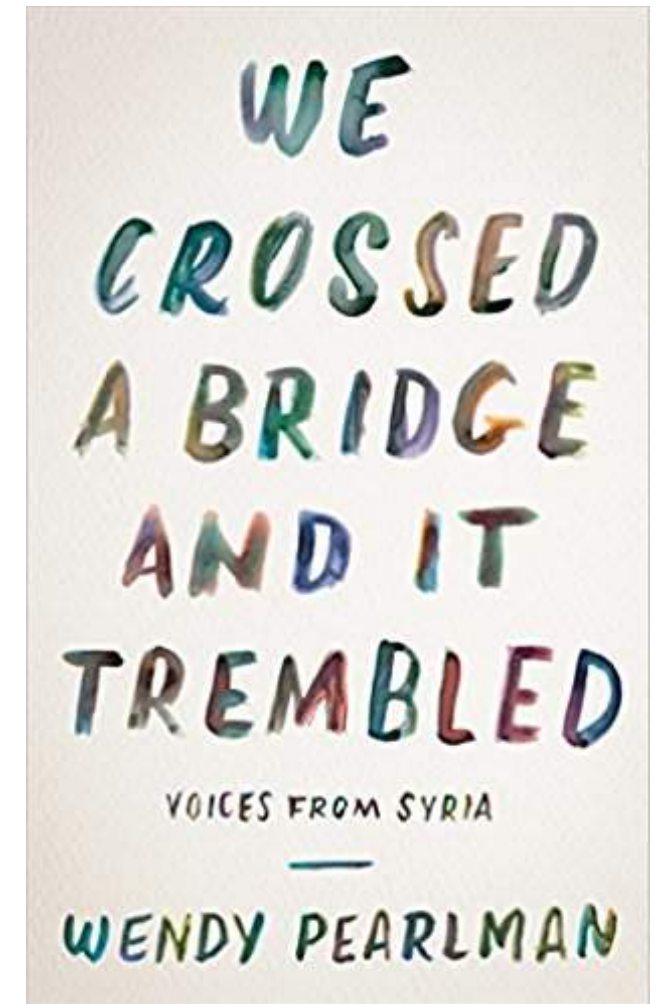
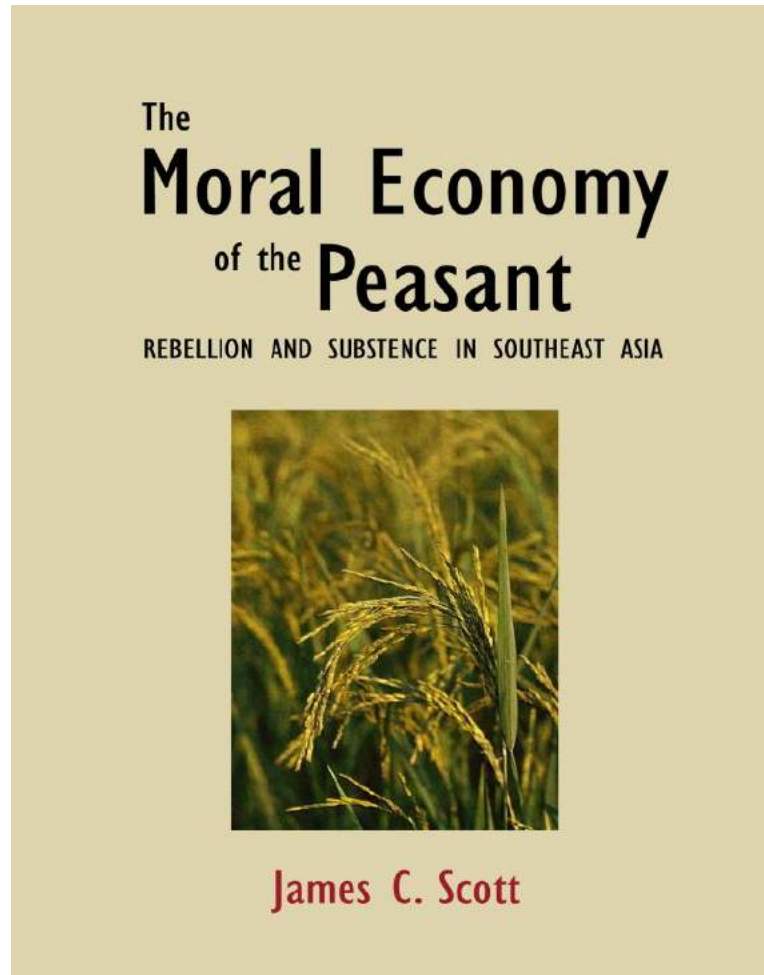
- Great deal of similarity across time and populations, with offers of 40-50% common
- Offers less than 20% are frequently rejected
- Modal offer in a “Dictator Game” often zero, though average offer is typically 20-30%
- Both results suggest people act out of a sense of fairness and prosociality



Source: Henrich et al. 2004.

Note: The size of the bubble at each location along each row represents the proportion of the sample that made a particular offer. The right edge of the lightly shaded horizontal gray bar gives the mean offer for that group.

Indeed, “injustice” is a common explanation in histories and ethnographies of who participates in revolts and rebellions



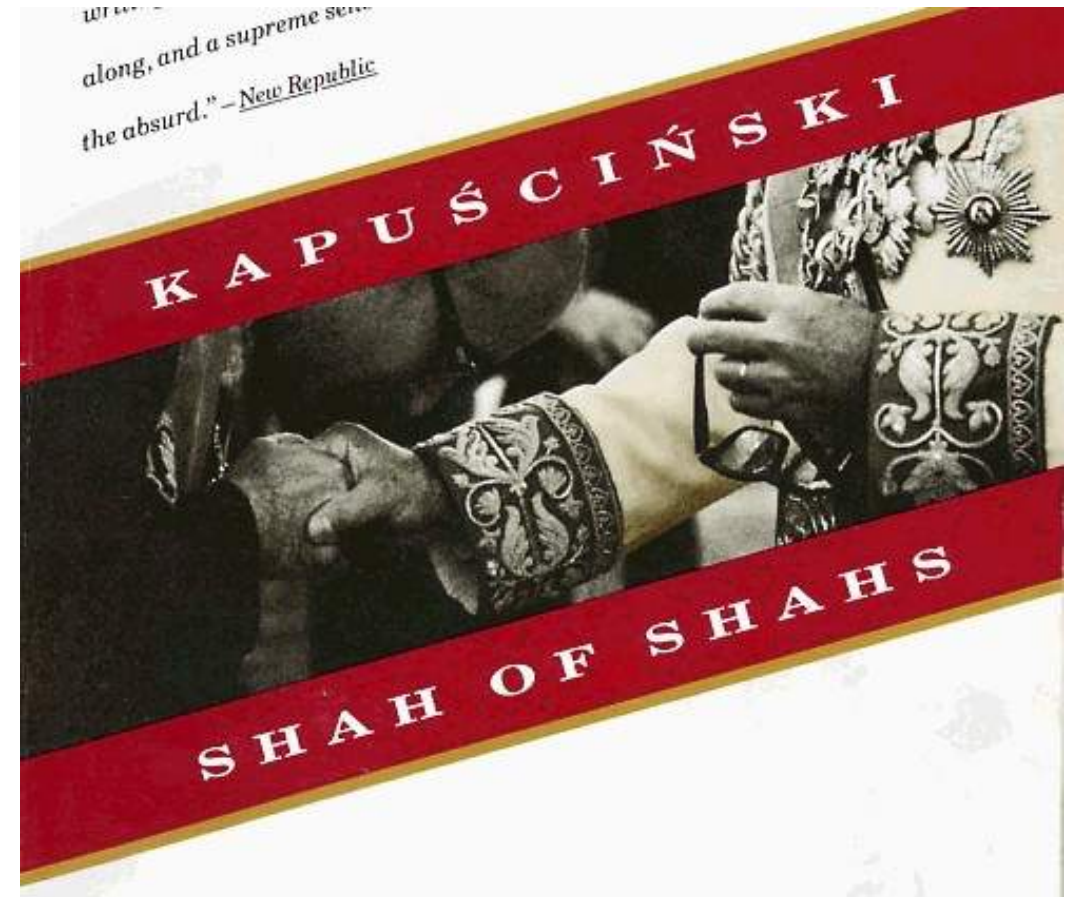
It is difficult to ignore emotion as a factor in conflict, and intrinsic preferences for punishment or justice are one way to bring emotion into our framework

All books about all revolutions begin with a chapter that describes the decay of tottering authority or the misery and sufferings of the people.

They should begin with a psychological chapter, one that shows how a harassed, terrified man suddenly breaks his terror, stops being afraid.

This unusual process, sometimes accomplished in an instant like a shock or a lustration, demands illuminating. Man gets rid of fear and feels free. Without that there would be no revolution.

— Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs*, 1985



Many forms of political participation are hard to explain without an appeal to preferences: intrinsic motivations or emotional rewards



Back to Athens versus Sparta

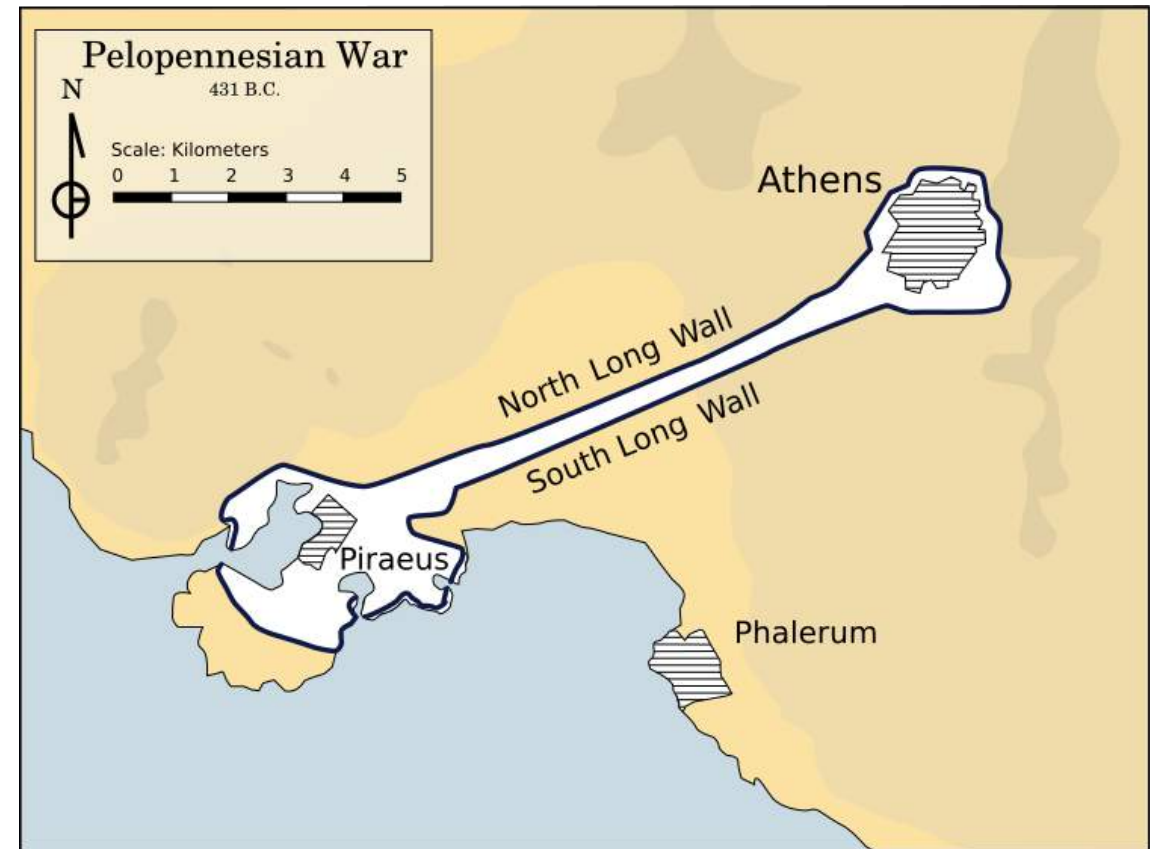
- Ex-ante this does not look like a war of vengeance or ideals
 - Despite the differences, little indication this was an intrinsically value-based war
 - No real motive for vengeance at the outset
- But historians of the war tell us that violence, once begun, elicited powerful emotions and responses.
- Could this help explain persistent wars even if started by other forces?
- If so, why do both parties take the risk?
 - A risky gamble? Miscalculation?

Anger, frustration and a desire for vengeance increased as the fighting dragged on, resulting in a progression of atrocities...

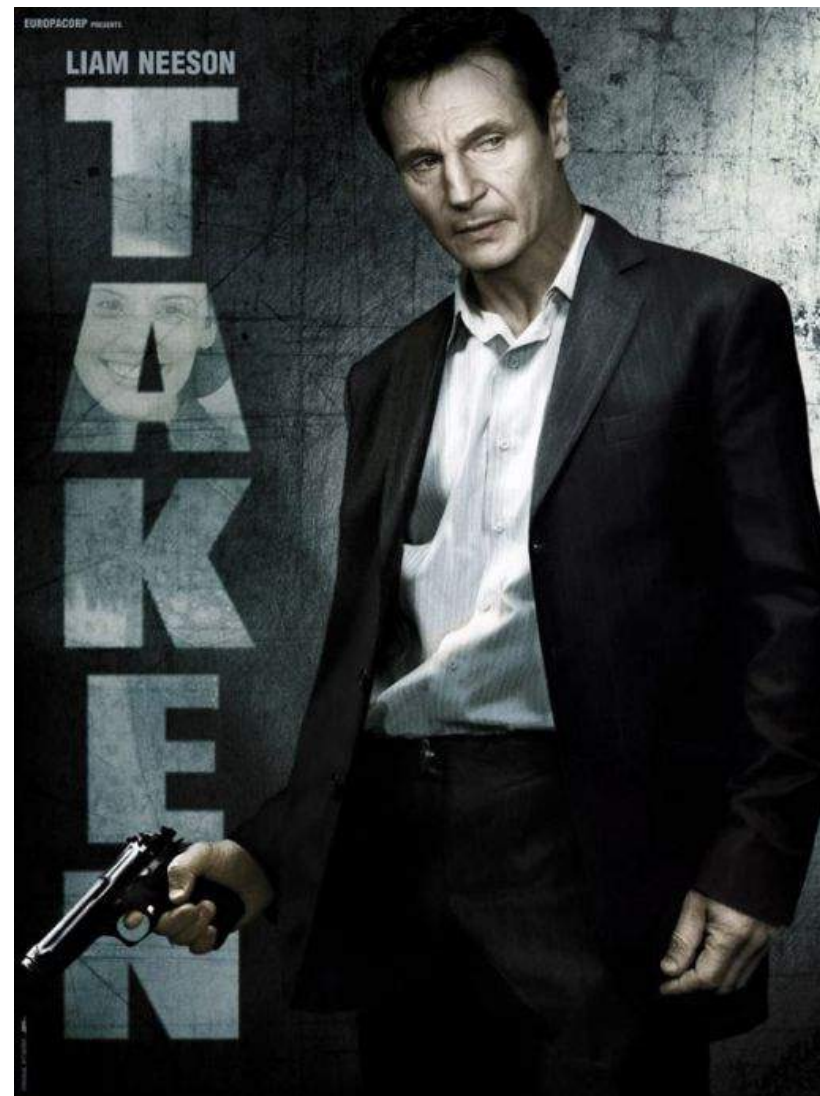
— Kagan (2003, p. xxiv)

There are also instances of the Spartans strategically using emotions and preferences for justice

- Sparta has world's greatest land army
 - They know that they cannot beat the navel power Athens at sea
- Leader of Athens knows that they will be defeated if they meet Sparta on field
- Hence Athens builds the Long Walls
 - Spartans cannot breach them
- Spartans roam Athenian countryside burning villages and properties attempting to enrage and embarrass nobles and citizens
 - Goading Athenians into the battle field



The long walls of Athens



Informal “assignment”:

Think of reasons for war that you do not
think belong in this model

Also, in terms of your readings...

