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Nastiness in Groups

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2021



INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKING VS. DECISION-MAKING IN GROUPS

Many important decisions are made in groups rather than by individuals

Academia, business, politics, judiciary, military, family

Economics: groups more self-regarding (money-maximizing) and rational than individuals

- Based on laboratory experiments (Prisoner's Dilemma, Dictator and Trust games)
- Mostly attributed to the group decision-making process

"Groups are more likely to make choices that follow standard game-theoretic predictions, while individuals are more likely to be influenced by biases, cognitive limitations, and social considerations" (Charness and Sutter 12, JEP)





INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKING VS. DECISION-MAKING IN GROUPS



... But is this the whole story?



- Vandalism and violence against strangers often in collective settings (crowds, gangs, armed groups).
- Covert obstructionism and sabotage in organizations and large bureaucracies.

"Isolated he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd he is a barbarian" (Le Bon, 1895)

"Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob." (Publius, 1788)

These patterns are hard to explain by purely self-regarding (money-maximizing) behavior



ARE PEOPLE NASTIER TOWARDS OUTSIDERS WHEN IN GROUPS?

Research questions:

- Do people become nastier to other people when acting in groups vs. individually? (are decisions in groups more self-regarding/less prosocial or more nasty/more antisocial)?
- Due to group context (being part of a group) or group decision-making?

Why important:

- Prevalence of prosocial behavior important for cooperation, provision of public goods, etc. (Fehr and Gachter 02; Gintis et al. 05)
- Nasty behavior reduces cooperation even in situations in which mutual cooperation is an equilibrium for selfish players (Fehr, Hoff, and Kshetramade 08).
- Greater scope for welfare losses and mutually destructive conflicts.





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Measuring nasty/antisocial behavior

- Decision whether to financially harm an anonymous counterpart at a small personal cost (Joy of Destruction game)
- Comparison with previous work: harm a counterpart for a personal benefit (Prisoner's Dilemma game)

Effect of group context

- Individual choice
- Choice on behalf of a group (no communication among group members)

Effect of group decision-making

- Choice on behalf of a group
- Joint group decisions (after communication and deliberation)





Experiments 1 and 2: Initial patterns (2013)

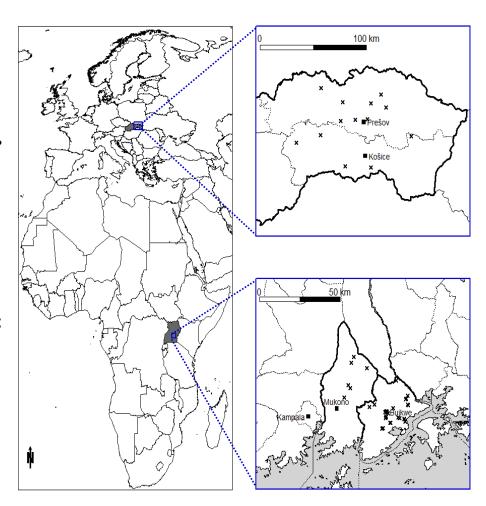
- Adolescents from Slovakia (age 13-15): N=790; 13 schools
- Adolescents from Uganda (age 12-18): N=1,679); 34 schools
- > "Destructiveness shift". Making a decision in a group context increases the prevalence of nasty behavior in JDG and increases defection in PDG.

Experiment 3: Mechanisms (2019)

- University students in Slovakia (N=795); 2019
- Different group-context treatments, additional tasks
- Mechanisms: Reduced perception of individual responsibility (self-image);
 social-image concerns (signaling toughness); in-group/out-group biases;
 pleasing other group members; action bias (destruction=active choice)

Experiment 4: Generalizability to adult population, heterogeneity analysis (2019)

Nationally representative sample of adults in Slovakia (N=4,243)



RELATED LITERATURE



Nasty behavior quite common

- Falk et al. 05, Abbink and Herrmann 11, Prediger et al. 14, Kranton et al. 18
- The lowest prevalence of nasty behavior in our four experiments: 12%

Moral wiggle room and low perception of individual responsibility increase the prevalence of unfair or immoral behavior for own financial benefit

- Scope for excuses by obscuring the role of decision-maker in determining the outcome (Dana et al. 06, Dana et al. 11); Reduced likelihood of making pivotal decision (Falk et al. 20); Reduced salience of self (Falk 17)
- Self-signaling models (Benabou and Tirole 11, Benabou et al. 18)
- Another important decision environment: acting on behalf of a group

Differences between individual decisions and decisions in groups

- Greater prevalence of self-regarding behavior due to group deliberation (Charness and Sutter 12, Kugler et al. 12)
- Greater prevalence of nasty behavior due to group context

EXPERIMENT 1 AND 2 (ADOLESCENTS IN SLOVAKIA AND UGANDA) INITIAL PATTERNS



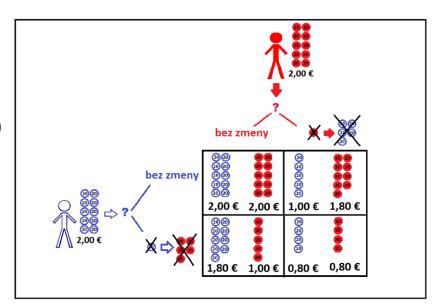
EXPERIMENTAL TASKS

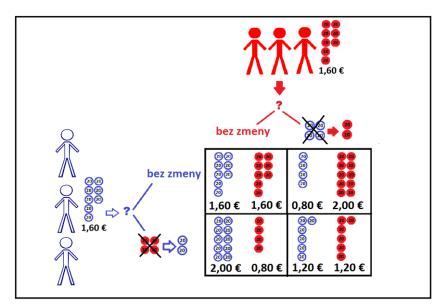
Joy of Destruction Game (JDG)

- Aim: Distinguish between selfish and anti-social behavior
- Two players with same endowment (EUR 2 in Slovakia, Ush 1000 in Uganda)
- Choice to destroy: lower other's payoff (by 50%) at own cost (by 10%)
- Destructive choice consistent with:
 - Selfishness (money-maximizing)
 - Anti-social preferences: minimizing counterpart's payoff;
 maximize payoffs difference

Prisoner's Dilemma Game (PDG)

- Aim: replicate findings of previous studies
- Two players with same endowment (EUR 1.6 in Slovakia, Ush 800 in Uganda)
- Choice to defect: lower other's payoff (by 50%) in order to increase own payoff (by 25%)
- Defection consistent with:
 - Selfishness (money-maximizing)
 - Anti-social preferences



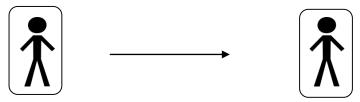






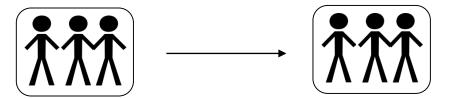
Individual

Choices made individually in isolation



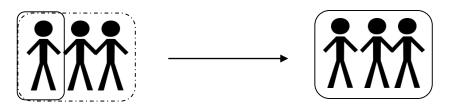
Group

- Subjects in groups of three
- 4 min. to reach a joint decision



GroupContext_1

 Subjects from Group condition: individual preference regarding the group decision, prior to group discussion (but expected)



- GroupContext_2 (in Slovakia)
 - Individual decisions on behalf of the group





Payments

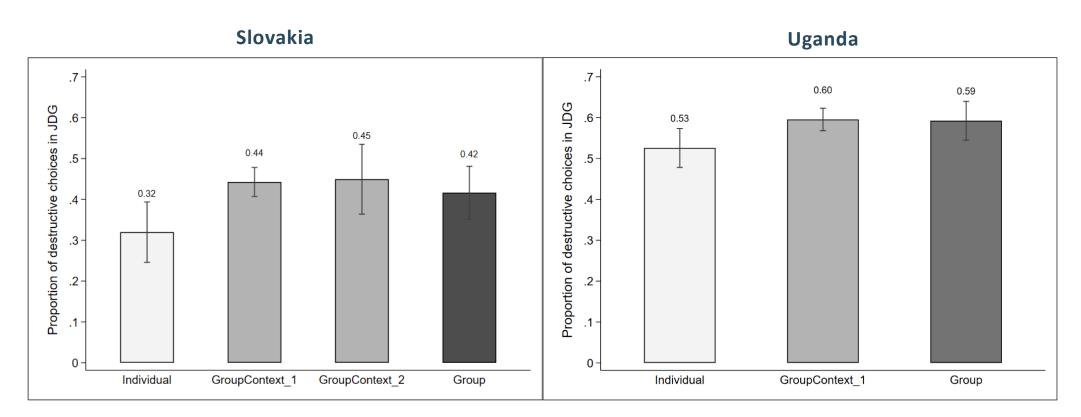
- All choices incentivized, except in the GroupContext_1 condition (hypothetical)
- Subjects paid for randomly selected decisions.
- Slovakia: Credit to order items from an experimental store
- Uganda: Earnings in cash

Anonymity

- All answers submitted under experimental ID.
- Answers submitted privately into a box (Slovakia) or collected by assistants (Uganda).
- Payments processed by a different person.



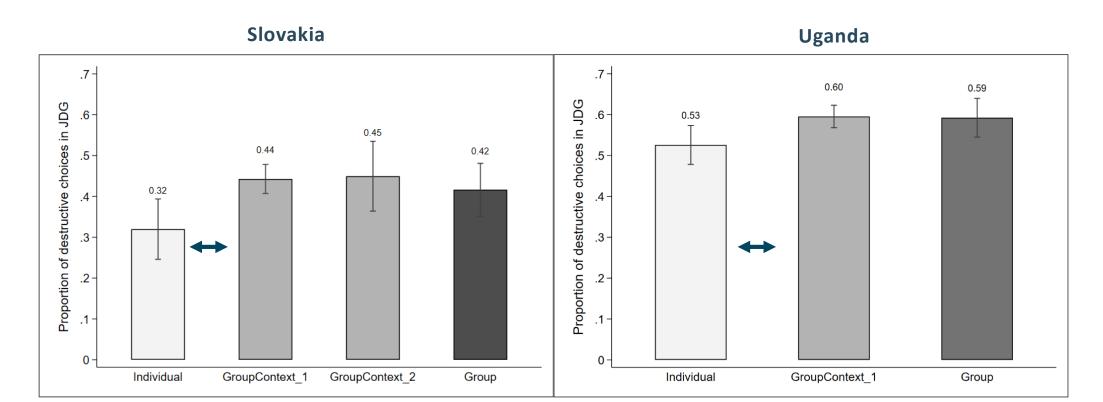




- When individuals decide for their groups, they are more destructive
- Groups decision-making process does not reduce destructiveness
- Groups are more destructive compared to individuals = less likely to follow standard game-theoretical behavior



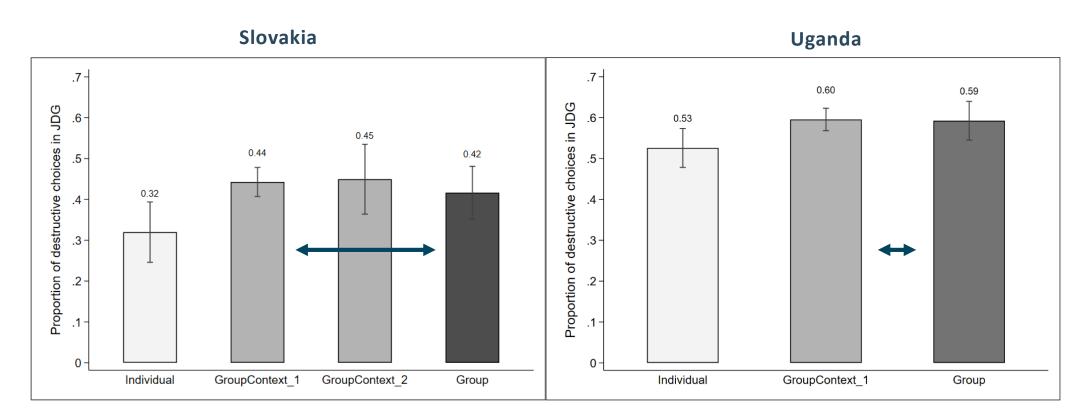




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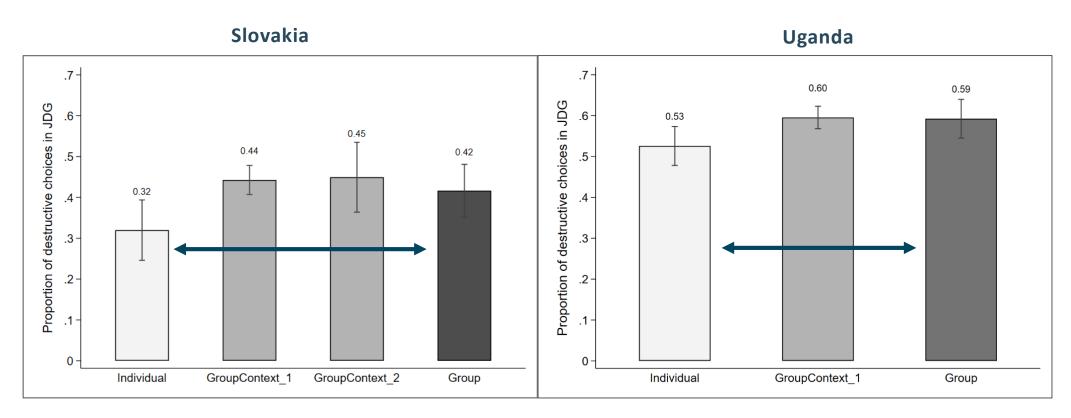




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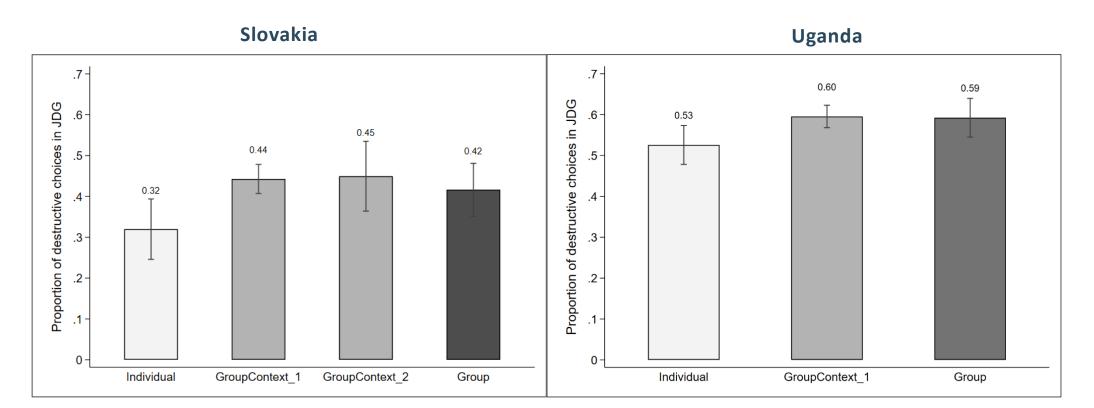




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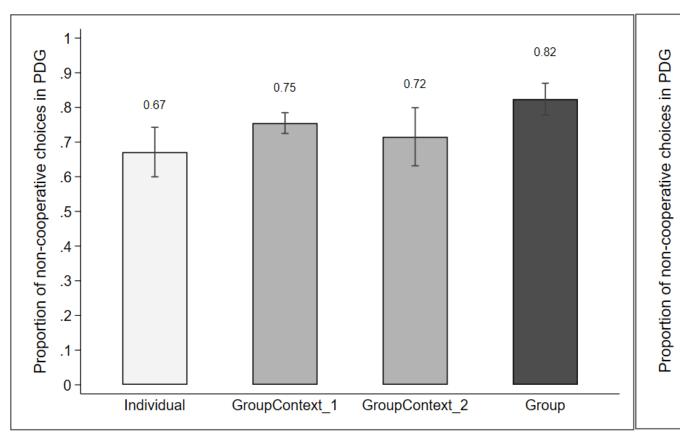
People in groups are not more self-regarding (money-maximizing), rather more anti-social = not less behavioral, rather more behavioral, but in a dark sense.

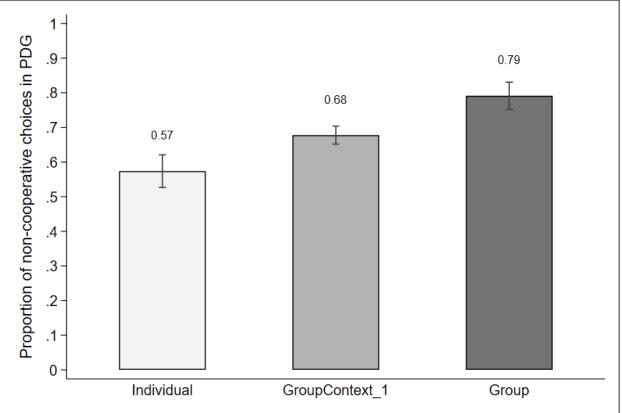




EXPERIMENT 1: Slovakia, adolescents

EXPERIMENT 2: Uganda, adolescents









Understanding

- Controlling for understanding
- Sub-sample of observations with perfect understanding

Design features

- Order of the games
- Experimenter fixed effects

Grade and school fixed effects





Do the effects generalize to adult population?

Mechanisms behing greater destructiveness in a group context?

- Reduced perception of individual responsibility (reduced self-image concerns)
- Social-image concerns (signaling toughness)
- Pleasing other group members
- In-group/out-group biases
- Action bias (destruction=active choice)







Sample

• 795 university students from Eastern Slovakia

Joy of Destruction Game and Prisoner's Dilemma game

- Unconditional decisions
- Two conditional decisions
- Beliefs about behavior of the counterpart

Player B:

Player A:

	Non-dest.	Destructive	
Non-dest.	10, 10	5, 9.5	
Destructive	9.5, 5	9.5, 5 4.5, 4.5	

Player B:

		Cooperate	Defect
Player A:	Cooperate	8, 8	4, 10
	Defect	10, 4	6, 6





Individual

GroupContext_Hidden

- Individual decisions on behalf of a group of three
- Decision of one randomly selected group member payoff relevant
- Group members anonymous to each other, no interactions

GroupContext_Observed

- Individual decisions on behalf of a group of three
- Decision of one randomly selected group member payoff relevant
- Choices directly observed by all group members

Group

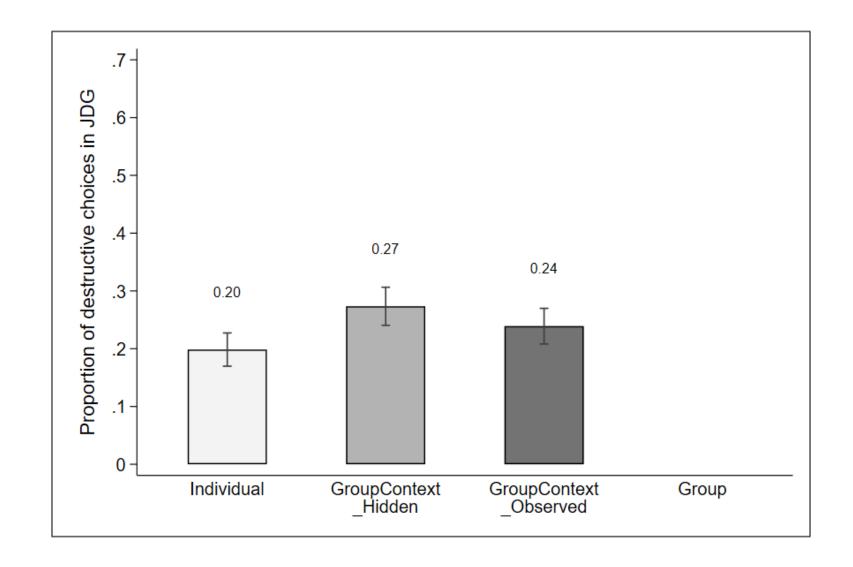
- As a surprise after GroupContext (rematched)
- 4 min. to reach a joint decision

Mechanisms

- Reduced perception of individual responsibility
- Social-image concerns (signaling toughness)
- In-group/out-group biases
- Pleasing other group members
- Action bias (destruction=active choice)

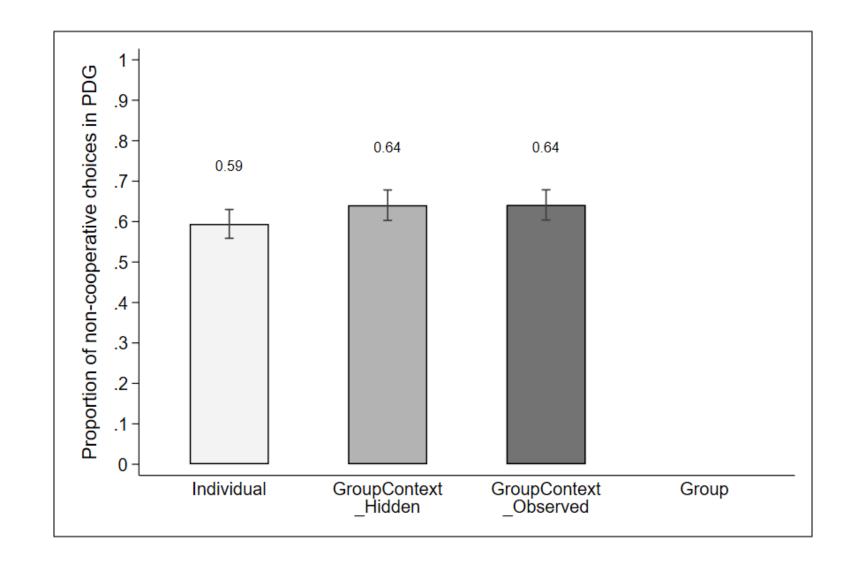


JOY OF DESTRUCTION GAME: EFFECT OF GROUP CONTEXT





PRISONER'S DILEMMA GAME: EFFECT OF GROUP CONTEXT







"Destructiveness shift": Making a decision in a group context increases the prevalence of nasty behavior in JDG and increases defection in PDG.

Not consistent with selfishness

Destructive choice in JDG one-shot, anonymous and costly for the decision-maker.

Unlikely to be driven by beliefs

 Group context increases prevalence of destructive behavior in unconditional as well as in both conditional decisions.

Unlikely to be driven by negative reciprocity

• Group context increases prevalence of destructive behavior also in a situation when the counterpart was non-destructive.

MECHANISMS



Reduced moral costs to self-image

 More people involved in decision-making, decisions on behalf of an anonymous group: reduced perception of individual responsibility.

Little scope for other mechanisms

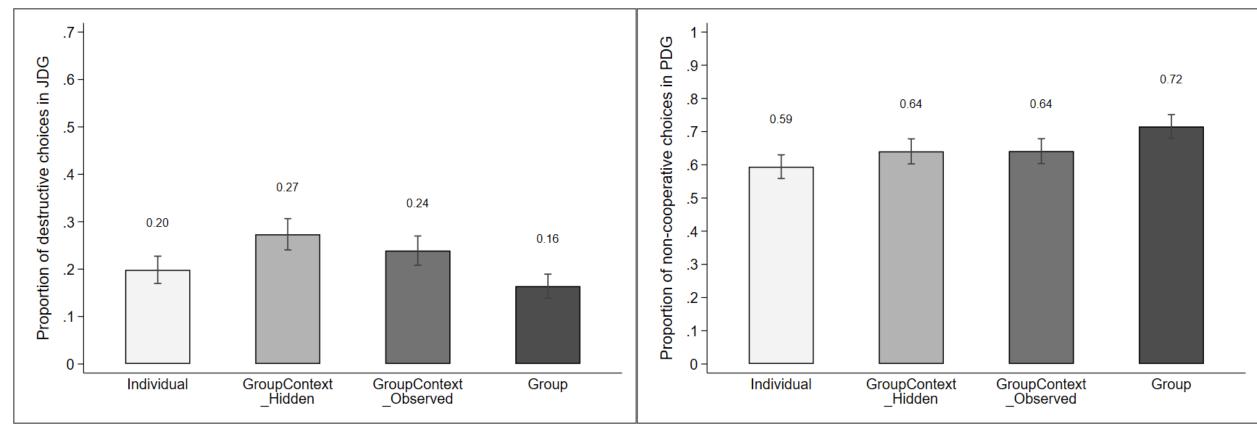
- **Social image consideration**, signaling toughness to others (e.g. due to expected future interactions): the effects are not stronger in GC_Observed than in GC_Hidden.
- **Pleasing other group members** if subjects belief other group members prefer the destructive choice: not consistent with the analysis of beliefs about unconditional decisions of other two group members.
- Salient group boundary, in-group/out-group bias: effect already in GC_Hidden where no group attribute is shared by the group members.
- Action bias: not more likely to make an active choice in an unrelated task





Joy of Destruction game

Prisoner's Dilemma game



Group decision-making increases prevalence of behavior that maximizes the payoff of the group



SAMPLE AND TASK



Sample

- 4,243 adults in the Slovak Republic.
- Online panel
- Representative in terms of age, education, size of place of residence, region of residence (males and respondents with lower education slightly under-represented)

Joy of Destruction Game and Prisoner's Dilemma game

- Unconditional decisions
- Two conditional decisions
- Beliefs about behavior of the counterpart
- All choices incentivized, one randomly selected decision payoff relevant.





Individual

GroupContext_Hidden

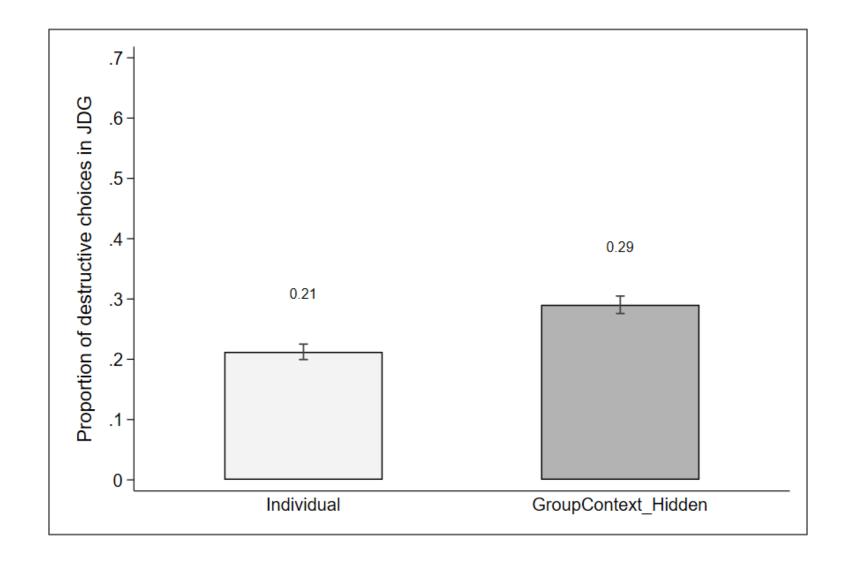
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Mechanisms

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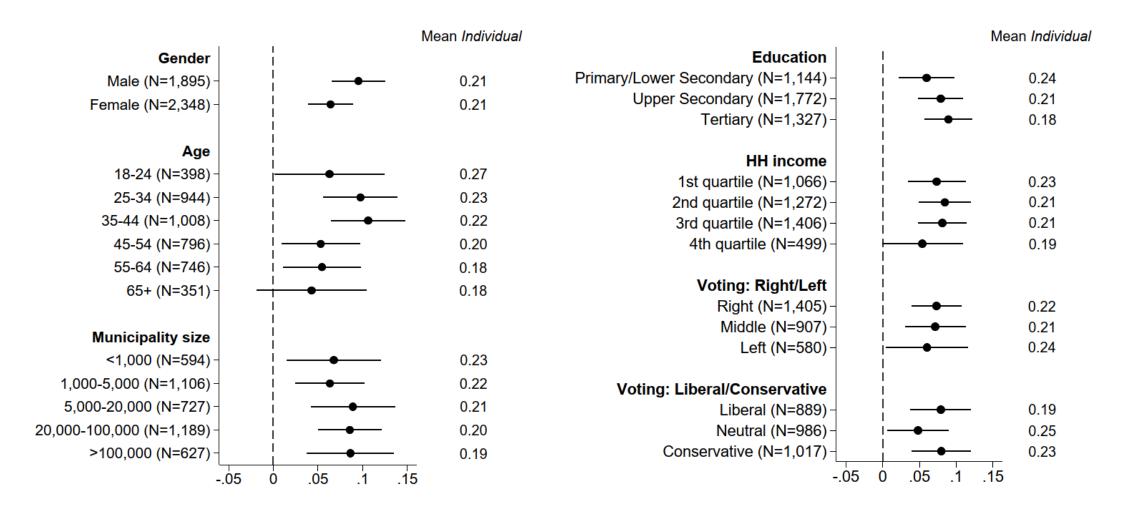


JOY OF DESTRUCTION GAME: EFFECT OF GROUP CONTEXT





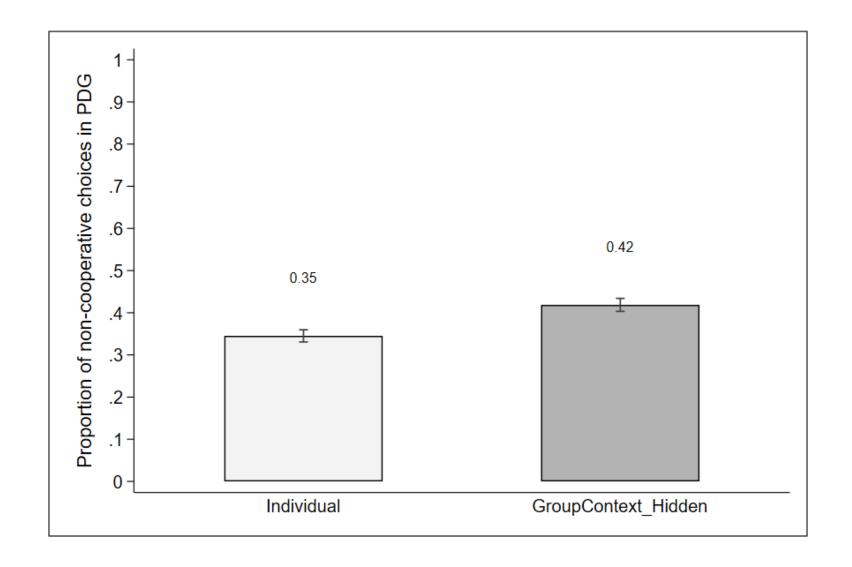
HIGHER DESTRUCTIVENESS IN A GROUP CONTEXT: HOLDS ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF SUB-GROUPS





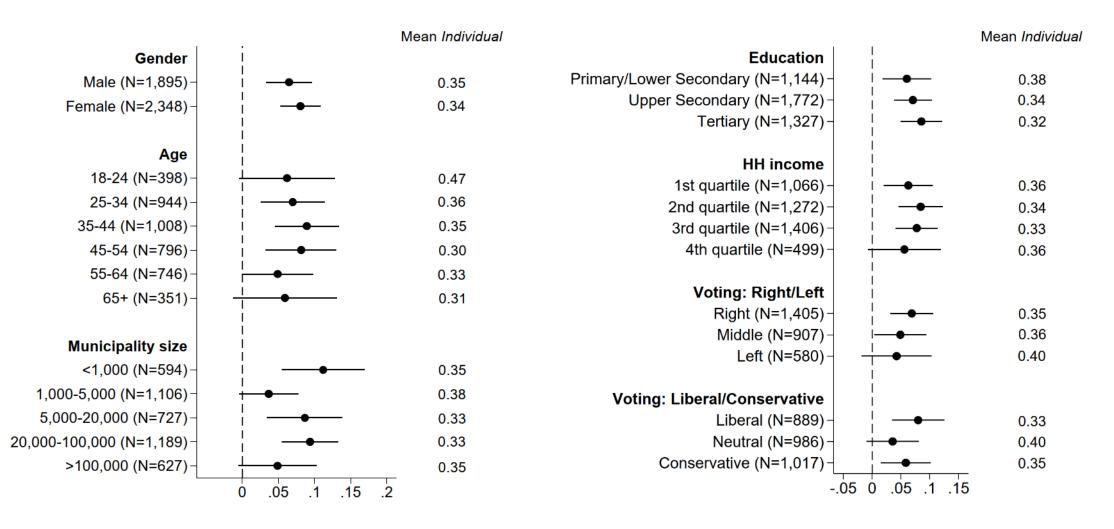
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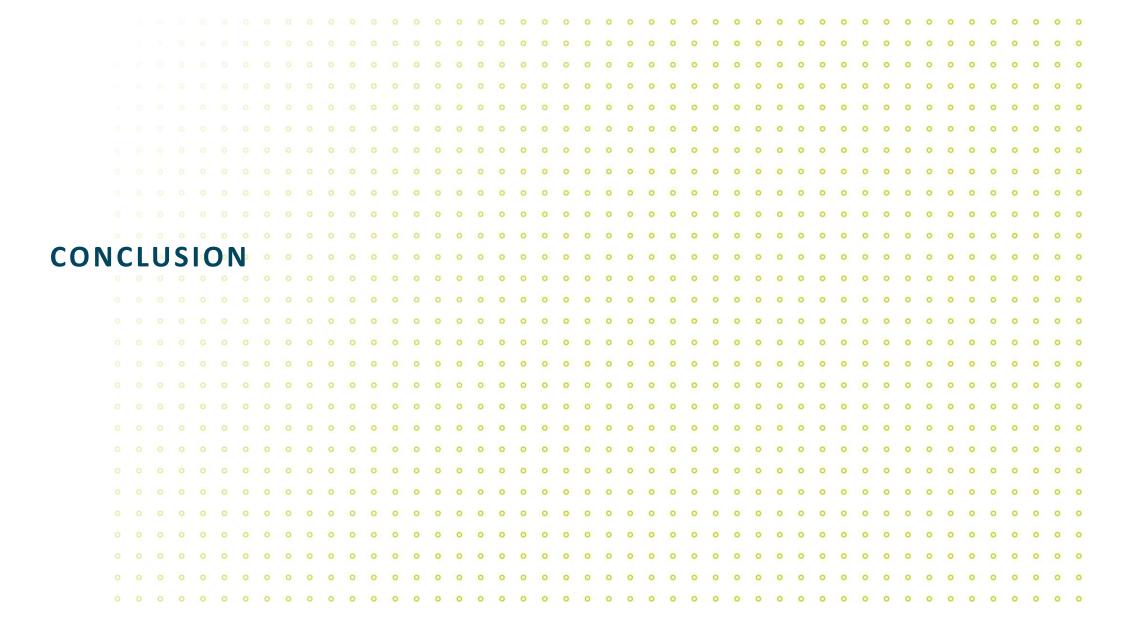






HIGHER DEFECTION IN A GROUP CONTEXT: HOLDS ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF SUB-GROUPS





CONCLUDING REMARKS



• Summary:

- People more nasty/destructive when making decisions on behalf of a group.
- Holds in four experiments, across a broad range of demographic and socio-economic subgroups.
- Group decision-making (communication/aggregation of preferences): decreased destructiveness among university students, but not among adolescents.
- > People in groups (and group decisions) not necessarily "less behavioral" than individuals.

Implications

- Perception of individual responsibility can be diluted in groups, leading to undesirable social behavior.
- Organizations may want to create environments that foster the perception of individual responsibility.
- Endogenous response to group context effects: some people may join groups, gangs or protests because of anonymity and ease to act upon their nasty inclinations.

May all your group decisions be productive and non-destructive! Thank you!

This project is a group work with Michal Bauer, Dagmara Celik Katreniak, Julie Chytilová, Lubomír Cingl, and Tomáš Želinský.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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