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THE EVOLUTIONARY BASIS OF HONOR CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Around the globe, people fight for their honor, even if it means sacrificing their lives. This is puzzling from an evolutionary perspective, and little is known about the conditions under which honor cultures evolve. We implemented an agent-based model of honor, and our simulations showed that the reliability of institutions and toughness of the environment are crucial conditions for the evolution of honor cultures. Honor cultures survive when the effectiveness of the authorities is low, even in very tough environments. Moreover, the results show that honor cultures and aggressive cultures are mutually dependent in what resembles a predator-prey relationship described in the renowned Lotka-Volterra model. Both cultures are eliminated when institutions are reliable. These results have implications for understanding conflict throughout the world, where Western-based strategies are exported, often unsuccessfully, to contexts of weak institutional authority wherein honor-based strategies have been critical for survival.