Tribal Mind Symposium

Protecting the Tribe from Dominant Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Within (and often across) species, individuals have very similar demands for survival, growth, and reproduction, and their combined demand eventually exceeds supply. This creates competition between conspecifics for commonly desired resources. In turn, variance in traits that aid in the claiming and holding of limited resources, have resulted in the emergence of social hierarchy as the primary means of social organization for the vast majority of group-living animals. While for groups and tribes, hierarchy can be functional – helping individuals to coordinate more efficiently and effectively toward shared goals – social rank and associated rewards and privileges also motivate individuals to establish dominance over others for personal advantage, often at the expense of their tribe. In response, the anthropological records suggest tribes developed "leveling mechanisms" – criticism, ridicule, disobedience, desertion, removal, or even assassination – intended to level the hierarchy and limit the power of leaders. However, because groups at times compete with each other, there are also times when tribes themselves benefit from the presence of dominant individuals and dominant leaders, and so we see contextual plasticity in tribal tolerance of, and support for dominance as a strategy for navigating social hierarchy. As the global population grows and societies become increasingly polarized, competition between tribes intensifies. How might this new era of tribal competition shape the social hierarchies and leaders of the coming decades?

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Protecting the Tribe from Dominant Leaders

Competition for resources that are in limited supply is the primary reason that humans, like the vast majority of primates (Sapolsky, 2005) and other group-living species, organize themselves around social hierarchy (Fiske, 2010; Leavitt, 2005; van Vugt, 2008). Hierarchy is the natural consequence of individual differences in the capacity to seize and retain desired resources within a competitive environment (i.e., resource holding potential). The greater the resource holding potential, the higher the rank; the higher the rank, the greater the availability of desired resources (Alberts et al., 2003; Cowlishaw & Dunbar, 1991). This rank ordering, where few occupy the upper echelons and many the foundations, gives us the characteristic pyramid associated with hierarchy.

The pyramid is a fitting semaphore for hierarchy – building the pyramids of Giza in Egypt's Old Kingdom required the sustained (15-30 years) and concerted efforts of many (20-30 thousand individuals), guided by a strong central authority. To such ends hierarchy can be functional (Halevy, 2011), incentivizing individuals to work hard in the pursuit of elevated social rank (Tannenbaum et al., 1974). At the group level, hierarchy facilitates division of labor and patterns of deference that reduce conflict (Bendersky & Hays, 2012) and aid coordination (Halevy et al., 2011; 2012; Ronay et al., 2012; Swaab et al., 2014; van Vugt et al., 2008). Thus, so long as rank is determined by behaviors that serve group, organizational, or tribal interests (e.g., Baron et al., 1986; Pfeffer & Cohen, 1984), hierarchy incentivizes performance in service to group productivity, efficiency, formidability, and legacy.

Although the individuals that constitute any given hierarchy may change over time, the social structure itself is quite robust. One reason for this is that advantages that accrue to the group from incentivized performance flow more freely to the upper ranks, and so those there

seated are apt to preserve hierarchy (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Phillips & Lowery, 2018). And although low rank comes with relative disadvantage, motivation to move to relative advantage (and the belief that such social mobility is possible) can lead people to preserve hierarchy (Jost & Banaji, 1994). These incentives lend social structural strength to hierarchy.

Hierarchy Stimulates Competition for Social Rank

However, one consequence of a widely shared motive to elevate one's social rank is competition. Take organizations, where CEOs rank at the apex of their organization's hierarchy. Although the role of a CEO is of immense pressure and great importance to organizational outcomes, there are compensatory advantages. For instance, in 2021 S&P 500 CEOs averaged $18.3 million in compensation – 324 times the median worker's pay (aflcio.org). Beyond such staggering financial remuneration at the very top of organizational hierarchies, across the world, the broader spectrum of social class is strongly linked to mental and physical health, mortality, and reproductive outcomes (Elo, 2009).

Anthropological work also reveals clear links between social rank and welcome advantages. These advantages center around preferential access to resources such as food, food-producing territories, social favors, and reproductive opportunities (Betzig, 2012; Ridgeway & Cornell, 2006; Turke & Betzig, 1985; von Rueden et al., 2011; Willer, 2009). In one study, von Rueden and Jaeggi (2016) found social rank to be a significant predictor of male reproductive success in 33 non-industrialized societies across the world. Among non-human primates, social rank is the primary indicator of resource control and reproduction (de Waal, 1989). For example, about 50% of variance in reproductive success is accounted for by the social rank of male baboons (Alberts et al., 2003; Cowlishaw & Dunbar, 1991). The bottom line here is that if you

find yourself embedded in hierarchy, be it tribal, troop, or trade, it is better to be closer to the top than the bottom; and so people find ways to compete for social rank.

The Primacy of Dominance as Rank Determinant

The most common way in which competition for social rank plays out within non-human species is via expressions of dominance. In the field of biology, dominance is characteristically determined dyadically, in tournament-like contests based on force and aggression (Hind, 1974). Deference results from fear and intimidation instilled in less formidable others by those who possess greater resource holding potential. When repeated agonistic encounters result in consistent outcomes, dominance hierarchies form, thereby eliminating the ongoing costs of outright conflict for both parties (Maynard Smith & Price, 1973).

Via our common ancestry with other primates, humans too make frequent use of dominance as a social regulatory tool (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), and to good effect (Cheng et al., 2013). As with other species, dominance characteristically entails the use of intimidation and coercion to attain one's personal goals, sometimes at the expense of the larger group (Maner & Case, 2016; Ronay et al., 2020). However, in contrast to other species, human dominance is not always determined dyadically, nor purely on the basis of physical formidability. For example, social dominance can be facilitated by having an assembly of allies, or institutional legitimation. Even within non-human primates, the alpha is not always the biggest and strongest, as sometimes coalitional support trumps individual formidability (de Waal, 1989). Making social support, at times, the deciding factor in determining dominance. For this reason, primates make substantial use of grooming and selective sharing to garner agonistic support for their own enterprises (Schino, 2007), and humans seek to build alliances by social exchange, strategic influence, and language-based persuasion (Benitez-Burraco, 2021; Buss, 1992; Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Overconfidence Provides a Competitive Edge

Humans display a remarkable capacity for shifting between allies and leaders when they can be convinced that doing so will improve their material circumstances (Christia, 2012). Given this premium that political success places on persuasion and influence, overconfidence has considerable utility in competitions surrounding social hierarchy (Ronay et al., 2022; van Vugt & Ronay, 2014).

People look to the confident for guidance, and follow the confident when faced with uncertainty. As such, confidence per se is central to people's expectations of what a leader should look like, and how a leader should behave (Lord et al., 1984; Offerman et al., 1994; Ronay et al., 2019). However, whereas confidence denotes competence and ability – undeniably desirable qualities for a leader to possess – the appearance of *over*confidence is nearly indistinguishable from that of confidence (Ronay et al., 2019). And so, at least in the short term (Barkow, 1992; Melwani, 2012; Ronay et al., 2022), overconfidence deceptively leverages the information value of confidence, intimidating unwitting rivals and attracting easily-duped followers.

Evidence for the utility of overconfidence in the leadership arena can be seen in the relationship between overconfidence and leader emergence (Anderson et al., 2012), and selection (Ronay et al., 2019). For example, we (Ronay et al., 2019) employed a combination of field studies, experiments, agent-based modeling, and cross-sectional data from US voters in the context of the 2016 US Primaries to demonstrate a consistent positive relationship between overconfidence and leadership appointment. Our agent-based modeling revealed that when leadership candidates face voter preferences that favor displays of confidence (such as were observed in one of our studies examining US voter preferences), they are incentivized to engage

in an arms race for ever increasing levels of *over*confidence. When we modeled the voter preferences we had sampled over a series of "elections", we observed candidate confidence steadily increasing in all iterations of the simulation. And, the more candidates compensated for inferior competence by increasing displays of confidence, the less likely it became that the most competent competitor won the election. The upshot of this is that so long as braggadocio is not punished by voters, the average quality of elected leaders is likely to suffer in the longer run.

Simply put, overconfidence is a form of false signaling that aids in competition for social rank, positioning overconfidence as a useful social tool for social advancement (Mayoral et al., 2022). Indeed, many species make use of false signaling when contesting dominance. For instance, male fig wasps signal their fighting ability during disputes over territory by displaying their impressive mandibles (Moore et al., 2009). Large mandibles are intimidating to other males as they can inflict significant damage, and so deference can be won without direct contest. Capitalizing on this advantage, there is an atypical male phenotype that has developed mandibles 50% larger than expected for body size – making their exaggerated jawlines an impressively daunting display in the fig wasp world. These mandibles act as a competitive signal; their wielders are compelled to fewer fights while experiencing higher mating success (mate access being a common source of disagreement among male fig wasps). Nonetheless, when compelled to combat, they fare poorly and incur more injuries than a typical male.

Similarly, overconfidence functions as a competitive signal targeted at dominance and social rank. Johnson and Fowler (2011) described how in competitive settings marked by uncertainty, the tenacity granted by overconfidence has the potential to maximize individual outcomes; and is so selected for over time (Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Számadó, 2000). This perspective is consistent with Error Management Theory (Haselton & Buss, 2000), which

predicts the emergence of psychological biases when; (1) the decision has recurrent impacts on fitness (reproductive success), (2) the decision is based on uncertain information, (3) the costs of false positives and false negatives are recurrently asymmetrical over evolutionary time. Overconfidence in one's abilities meet these criteria quite well.

First, via competition entry and deterrence of competitors, overconfidence impacts fitness by helping individuals compete for social resources such as status and prestige, and material rewards based on local economies (e.g., Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Second, uncertainty is a necessary condition for overconfidence to evolve, as under conditions of certainty the strongest or most obviously qualified rival simply takes the desired resource; and so the utility of overconfidence scales with uncertainty (Johnson & Fowler, 2011). Third, costs incurred via lost opportunities following from underconfidence, or even calibrated confidence, can be greater than costs associated with being overconfident, particularly during competition over limited resources (Soldà et al., 2021).

This third point concerning the opportunity costs of bowing out of contested opportunities, suggests also the utility of risk taking in the context of social competition (Ronay & von Hippel, 2010) and leader emergence (van Kleef et al., 2021). Risky decisions involve balancing potential costs and benefits (e.g., Bernoulli, 1738; Friedman & Savage, 1948; Real & Caraco, 1986; Rubin & Paul, 1979), and so calibration of one's capacities helps one assess when a risk is worth taking. And because people usually have some "skin in the game" when choosing to take risks, the signal communicated by taking a risk is one of genuine self-efficacy and confidence. Of course, overconfidence can lead to unnecessary or excessive risk (e.g., Krueger & Dickson, 1994; Malmendier & Tate, 2005, 2008), but there is often a temporal lag between the risky behavior and its consequence; and all would-be competitors must choose their own strategy

blind to whether the confidence driving another's risk taking is truly warranted. This logic suggests that overconfidence may drive greater risk-taking, but evidence for this causal inference remains unclear (Broihanne et al., 2014; Camerer & Lovallo, 1999; Ronay et al., 2016; Ronay et al., 2022).

Context and the Utility of Dominance

Despite the ubiquity of dominance hierarchies in the biological world, there is substantial variation across groups in terms of how strongly dominance features in determining social rank. Across groups and species, ecological variation in the distribution of resources results in differences in the utility of dominance (Ronay et al., 2020; von Hippel et al., 2016). In ecologies where resources are clustered, and so easier to "hold", traits such as physical size and aggression (i.e., resource holding potential) have been selected for (King et al., 2008).

The impact of the ecology on food consumption and reproductive opportunities, and the social hierarchies that follow, can be seen in the diverging social hierarchies of the African great apes (Wrangham, 1980) – bonobos, chimpanzees, and gorillas. Having diverged only about two million years ago, bonobos and chimpanzees are very closely related species. Nonetheless, they exhibit strikingly different social relationships. Dominant male chimpanzees control access to food and mates through aggression (Goodall, 1986; Muller, 2002; Muller et al., 2007; Watts & Mitani, 2002; Wilson & Wrangham, 2003). In contrast, bonobos rely on female-to-female alliances that are socially reinforced by sexual, as opposed to aggressive interactions (Harcourt & Waal, 1992). As there are no differences in terms of predation risk for bonobos and chimpanzees, explanations for their diverging social patterns lie in their feeding ecology (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996; Wrangham & Pilbeam, 2001).

The absence of gorillas throughout the bonobos' territories means that bonobos have greater access to terrestrial foods than do chimpanzees (Malenky & Wrangham, 1994; Wrangham, 1993; Wrangham & Peterson, 1996). This more even distribution of resources cannot be readily monopolized by staking and defending one's claim to a patch, thereby reducing the selective pressure on dominance as a means to a resource-rich end (Hare et al., 2012). In contrast, the clustering of resource-rich patches encountered by chimpanzees facilitates monopolization via dominance. Even within species there is variation in the extent to which dominance determines social standing. For instance, dominance is a stronger determinant of social rank among wild, versus captive baboons/chimpanzees (REF). On reserves, resources are provisioned by research teams in a manner that suppresses monopolization.

Among humans too, the utility of dominance varies with environmental ecologies and associated cultures (Ronay et al., 2018). For example, egalitarianism and community-wide sharing is normative in hunter-gatherer groups, as exemplified by the Hadza of Northern Tanzania (Marlowe, 2010). Among hunter gatherers such as the Hadza, mandated sharing serves as an insurance policy against failed hunts (Kaplan et al., 2005), so monopolization of food is constrained. And because traditional hunter-gatherer societies follow seasonal variations of plant and animal-based foods, the burden of transporting possessions over long distances imposes a constraint on hording personal riches. The enforced equality of hunter-gatherer societies and the inability to accumulate resources means that there is little to be gained through dominance (Ronay et al., 2018).

The egalitarianism and suppression of dominance exemplified by hunter-gatherer societies finds contrast in the Yanamamö (see, Chagnon, 2013) – hunter-horticulturalists of northern Brazil and southern Venezuela. The mainstay of Yanomamö diet is cultivated root crops

(Gross, 1975) that are high in calories but low in protein. For sources of animal protein, the Yanomamö turn to the rivers, where game tends to be clustered within discrete resource-rich bends. Similar to the patterns described among chimpanzees, these concentrated patches of resources provide opportunities for resource seizing and holding, lending greater utility to physical and psychological traits that enhance resource holding potential and the controlled expression of dominance (Chagnon, 1968).

Culture and the Expression of Dominance

Modern nations too exhibit substantial variation in the utility of dominance. Notably, variation in cultural tightness versus looseness (Gelfland et al., 2006) has been linked to the prevalence of dominance as an organizing social structure (Chen et al., 2022). Loose cultures (e.g., New Zealand, the Netherlands, the United States) have relatively weak social norms and relatively high tolerance of individuality and social deviance. In contrast, tight cultures (e.g., Singapore, Japan, Pakistan) are characterized by orderliness, regulation, pervasive norms, and the sanctioning of norm deviance (Gelfland et al., 2011). Governments in tight cultures usually have stricter law enforcement, exercise more control over media, and impose greater constraints on civil liberties (Gelfland et al., 2011). Although to many these constraints might seem an unwanted imposition on personal liberty, they are deemed less so in tight cultures. For instance, across 29 nations cultural tightness was associated with the endorsement of autonomous leadership – leader independence and not relying on others to make decisions (Aktas et al., 2016). These findings suggest dominance has greater utility in tight cultures.

Relatedly, the presence of tight versus loose culture is associated with socio-historical threats and challenges, such as population density, resource scarcity, historical conflict, disease, and famine (Gelfland et al., 2011). These findings suggest that adversity begets austerity, as

strong norms and compliance facilitate social coordination in service of survival; "whether it is to reduce chaos in nations that have high population density, deal with resource scarcity, coordinate in the face of natural disasters, defend against territorial threats, or contain the spread of disease." (Gelfland et al., 2011, p.1101).

Similarly, dominant leadership finds purchase in contexts that place a premium on social control and coordination – natural conditions of intergroup conflict (Lausten & Petersen, 2017) and economic uncertainty (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). Experimental manipulations of terrorist attacks, and civil conflict likewise result in people more strongly endorsing dominant leadership (Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009; Spisak et al., 2012; Laustsen & Petersen, 2020). The primary theoretical takeaway from these studies is that when competition within or between groups is a prevailing concern, people are more open to dominant leaders whose resource holding potential might be turned to protection, coordination, and control. If the challenge for groups is to hold onto resources that are in short supply, dominance appears to prevail.

Taken together, the literature suggests that although dominance is associated with the unequal distribution of power and attendant privileges, thereby imposing costs on low-ranking group members (Maner & Case, 2016; Ronay et al., 2020), these costs are more readily accepted when dominance also preserves or enhances group-level benefits. In other words, dominance as a determinant of social hierarchy, waxes and wanes with group- and individual-level advantages afforded by those who dominate. However, when survival and the chance to prosper is not immediately threatened, dominant individuals are a potential liability, as the resource holding potential dominance affords also allows the dominant to monopolize internal resources, be those food, comfort, assistance, or mates.

Coalitions of Resistance

Boehm (1997; 1999; 2012) has written extensively in the anthropological literature on the use of follower-based collective opposition aimed at reducing exploitation by dominant tribal leaders (see also Cheng, 2020; Wiessner, 2005). He describes "leveling mechanisms" such as criticism, ridicule, disobedience, desertion, removal, or even assassination (Boehm, 1997; 1999; Cheng, 2020) as a near universal response to attempts at dominating the group. For instance, in one analysis of 48 small-scale societies, 80% of recorded cases of collective opposition were aimed at unseating the overly dominant (Boehm, 1993).

Boehm's field work led him to identify within-group conflict in response to dominance as the likely seed of human morality – "the first behavior to be decisively outlawed and controlled by a human group may well have been the expression of dominance" (Boehm, 2000, p. 97). Dominance exerted toward one's followers is a clear signal that the leader's goals and interests diverge from those of their group, and so is unlikely to foster the sense of "we-ness" necessary for a shared sense of identity between leaders and followers (Ellemers et al., 2004).

Kohlberg's (1976; 1981) theory of cognitive moral development provides a framework for the moral contextualization of dominance. Kohlberg describes preconventional, conventional, and postconventional levels; where individuals at the preconventional level are guided by self-interest and failure to consider the impact of their behaviors on others (Trevino, 1992). Prioritizing their own outcomes over group goals and at times even resorting to behaviors that harm their group (Maner, 2017; Maner & Case, 2016), dominant leaders are characterized by the lowest of Kohlberg's stages. We might then expect dominance to be negatively related to the three primary dimensions of moral leadership – ethical, authentic, and servant (Lemoine et al., 2019) – and that moral aversion to dominance might at times seed united opposition (see also Gray, 2023).

There are some hints in the literature that support these possibilities. For example, dominance is positively correlated with socially aversive personality traits like narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Cheng et al., 2013; Davis & Vaillancourt, 2022). However, although dominance has been associated with less "likeability" (Cheng et al., 2013), and more severe punishment by third-party individuals, who see the dominant person as lacking in moral credentials (Kakkar et al., 2020), especially with regard to the moral foundations of harm/care and reciprocity/fairness (Khanipour et al., 2021), the use of *collective opposition* as a bottom-up approach to moral regime change has never been directly tested.

We recently took the opportunity to do so in a series of experiments (Ronay et al., in press). These studies revealed dominance to be negatively associated with moral leadership, undermining trust, stimulating negative gossip about the leader, and ultimately leading to collective action aimed at replacing the leader. Those preferences were experienced in response to leaders' dispositional levels of dominance and prestige, as well as following two different manipulations of dominance. To mimic the risks inherent to challenging a leader and mitigate demand effects, we disincentivized attempts to dislodge the leader by informing participants that, should an attempted challenge prove unsuccessful, the challengers would be subject to potential retribution by the leader, including the loss of bonus money that hung in the balance. Despite these risks, many participants still acted to replace the dominant leader, even when provided with clear alternative courses of action, such as communicating directly with the leader, or leaving the group for another with no penalty.

Distilling trust into its constituent components, we found evidence that dominance can lead to collective resistance by undermining perceptions of benevolence and integrity, but not perceptions of ability. And with regard to moral leadership, we found dominance to be

negatively associated with the three pillars of moral leadership – ethical, authentic, and servant leadership. These studies also directly assessed the role that strategic forms of gossip play in helping followers band together to collectively oppose dominant leaders. Because gossip allows people to identify like-minded others (Feinberg et al., 2012), negative gossip helps overcome the "first-mover" problem, wherein people are initially reluctant to seed the formation of collective opposition, lest they find themselves taking a lone stand against a disproportionately powerful adversary. These in-press studies provide the first experimental evidence for hierarchy "leveling mechanisms" aimed at ensuring the well-being of groups and their members.

When Prestige Prevails

Returning to our historical canvas – with dominance curtailed by coalitions of resistance, and with the advent of human culture, the determinants of social rank also changed; giving opportunity for other rank-defining attributes to shape social hierarchy. The evolution of human cultural capacity – integenerationally stable, high fidelity, social transmission – ushered in an environment for adaptation in which such transmissions were favored (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). As such, humans came to rely immensely on cultural learning and shared knowledge, which are facilitated by attention to group members who possess valued expertise, wisdom, or skill (i.e., prestige; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). These prestigious group members receive freely conferred deference and are granted influence by others in the group in return for opportunities to acquire or hone their own skills, knowledge, and expertise (Cheng et al., 2013; Maner, 2017).

Whereas dominance is similar to power (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), prestige is akin to the social psychological construct of status (i.e., respect and admiration) and prestige-based leaders are recognized by their group as possessing superior information or ability (Cheng et al., 2013; Maner, 2017). Individual differences in behavioral leanings towards dominance and prestige are

also associated with different personality traits. Dominant individuals are relatively high in dark-triad traits – Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy – whereas people who use prestige exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, agreeableness, conscientiousness, need for affiliation, and fear of negative evaluation (Case & Maner, 2017; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010).

Due to their weighting of social affiliation and agreeableness, prestige-oriented individuals tend to behave prosocially, exhibiting generosity and weighting the group's interest at least as highly than their own individual interests (Henrich et al., 2015; Maner, 2017). For example, prestige-oriented individuals encourage (rather than prevent) strong, positive relationships among subordinates (Case & Maner, 2014), utilize complaisant versus coercive influence tactics (Ketterman & Maner, 2021), and are granted deference only insofar as they exhibit culturally valued knowledge, skills, and abilities (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Given this prosocial orientation and the inherent value prestigious individuals bring to their groups, prestige-based leaders are unlikely to stimulate the same rancor and rebellion reserved for the dominant. Indeed, in our recent research we find instead that prestige is positively associated with perceptions of moral leadership, as well as higher levels of trust, positive gossip, and leader endorsement.

Although prestige is not associated with the forceful seizing of resources, consistent with the "service for prestige" theory of leader-follower relations (Price & van Vugt, 2014), there are individual benefits associated with prestige-based leadership – public praise, small gifts, favors, and assistance with projects (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; von Rueden et al., 2010; von Rueden et al., 2014). These advantages, similar to dominance, position prestige as a means to satisfy one's desire for social rank and attendant privileges (Suessenbach et al., 2019). However, while physical dominance is relatively blunt, the foundations of prestige – skills, knowledge, and

abilities sought by others – are sensitive to variation in groups and their associated cultures. In early human groups and extant small-scale societies, prestige might be garnered by developing and displaying one's physical skills in service of hunting, fishing, foraging, or by mediating challenging interpersonal conflicts that threaten group harmony. For modern humans, prestige might be won by developing a sizable social media following, by running for political office, or by achieving notable professional accolades. And within groups interlocked in conflict, prestige might be won by those who display strength, courage, and formidability.

Dominance Redux

Given that human groups developed collective mechanisms to constrain dominance, and with strong evidence to suggest that egalitarianism coupled with malleable, situation-specific hierarchies based on prestige became the norm for human group life, why then do we see so many modern examples of dominant leaders who have successfully entrenched their position power?

Agriculture was a critical historical turning point in this regard. Approximately ten thousand years ago, the development of agricultural societies with division of labor, stable differentiation of social roles, and the large-scale accumulation of material resources, ushered the way for dominance to again emerge as a viable strategy for attaining social rank (van Vugt et al., 2008). Intensive agriculture increased the defensibility of resources and allowed for the intergenerational transmission of wealth (Mulder et al., 2009), both of which facilitate the production of persistent institutionalized inequality. The transmission of wealth across generations provides opportunities to accrue substantial holdings, and to buy power in the form of resources, allies, armies, and mercenaries. Other critical ingredients supporting dominance include; conditions that allow certain individuals greater control of resources than others; a

willingness on the part of those individuals to use their control to institutionalize inequality (Mattison et al., 2016); and the suppression of exit options, or leveling mechanisms to guard against tyranny (Boehm et al., 1993; Woodburn, 1982).

However, if the agricultural revolution was the horse and cart that pulled inequality from the clutches of our egalitarian ancestors, the modern business environment is a locomotive by comparison (Ronay et al., 2018). The staggering financial incentives available in corporate leadership, incentives that are intended to attract and retain the best leadership candidates available, may ironically lead to the selection of leaders who have little interest in the fortunes of those they oversee. Dominant corporate leaders also benefit by virtue of the fact that enormous financial rewards can accrue irrespective of performance. For example, in one study that incorporated data across five decades and thousands of CEOs in 1400 publicly listed companies, overall CEO compensation was largely unrelated to corporate performance, with little difference in the financial outcomes of successful versus failed CEOs (Jensen & Murphy, 1990). When modern corporations preferentially allocate resources to the upper echelons and reduce the accountability of leaders, competition for rank is fierce (Jacquart & Armstrong, 2013; Jensen & Murphy, 1990; Malmendier & Tate, 2009), and prestige-oriented leaders are often insufficiently motivated to compete head-to-head with dominance-oriented leaders who are less ethically constrained and more strongly motivated by power and wealth.

Within the modern political arena too, dominance features prominently. In part, this can be linked to the effective suppression or elimination of normal democracy – independent judiciary, media, opposition, checks and balances, manipulated electoral systems, and the right or opportunity to protest. For example, King et al. (2013) downloaded and analyzed the content of millions of social media posts within China, posts that were captured before the Chinese

government was able to find and remove them. When the authors compared the content of those posts that were removed to those that were allowed to remain online, they find no evidence for the systematic removal of posts leveling criticism at the state, nor its leaders or policies. Instead, what they did silence were those posts aimed at inciting collective action by representing, reinforcing, or spurring social mobilization. Of course, China is not alone in seeking to implement social measures of control; this well-executed empirical example serves only to illustrate the lengths governments at times go to in order to restrict collective opposition.

Playing the power game skillfully, and using tribal narratives and propaganda are important too (Bar-Tal, 2023; Crano & Gaffney, 2023; Kreko, 2023). Propaganda in service of political dominance is an age-old game. For example, to satisfy cultural expectations of a warrior King, during her reign over Egypt in the 15th century BC, Pharaoh Hatshepsut had herself portrayed in statues and reliefs in male form (Margetts, 1951; Semat & Elthatawy, 2022); she leveraged religion by claiming divine origin as the daughter of the god Amun (Mark, 2012); and she employed threats and coercion in a manner characteristic of the dominant. For instance, an inscription carved in her temple at Deir el-Bahari reads, "he who shall do her homage shall live; he who shall speak evil in blasphemy of her Majesty shall die."

Across three and a half millennia, propaganda and coercion have remained critical tools for the seizing and securing political dominance (Chapman, 2000; Taylor, 2013) and we see very similar tactics employed by a variety of modern leaders (e.g., Biddle, 2020; Rogov, K., 2018; Tsourapas, 2021). For instance, dominance appears as a constituent of the co-constructed (by leader and followers) social identity of the US Capitol Hill rioters in 2021 (Haslam et al., 2022). Couched within the dual agency model of identity leadership and engaged followership, Trump and his followers can be seen to be simultaneously influencing each other in the creation of a

shared identity, and shared agenda (Haslam et al., 2022). Indeed, much of the political rhetoric in the US is predicated on the co-creation of polarized perspectives and the cultivation of fear concerning what might be lost if "we" do not prevail (Brandt et al., 2023).

Where to Now?

As the global population grows and societies become increasingly polarized, competition between groups intensifies. The literature and numerous historical examples suggest this polarization and competition across group lines may well see a rise in the prevalence and popularity of dominant leadership. Indeed, dominance is likely to find greater social and political traction when groups are large and fragmented (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), when the use of dominance is relatively normative (McClanahan et al., 2022), when there is a high level of intergroup competition (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015; Ronay et al., 2020) and distrust of outgroups (Clark, 2023; Van Lange & Reinders Folmer, 2023), or during conditions of economic uncertainty (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). In such settings, dominance might be justified and even preferred to the extent that it is seen to serve the interests of one's ingroup, and protect those interests from external threats and challenges (Kakkkar & Sivanathan, 2017). For this reason, dominant leaders may at times strategically stimulate conflict, or amplify concerns regarding potential conflict or other threats, in order to leverage support for the deployment of strong-arm tactics and tighter social controls.

Collective resistance may also be a less effective leveling mechanism as our global tribes continue to expand and divide. To be sure, the modern world presents wide-ranging and complex contexts that often make collective opposition untenable. For example, some group contexts might involve psychological barriers (e.g., low shared group identity; see Haslam et al., 2020), social barriers (e.g., low proximity or limited communication channels between followers; King

et al., 2013), or cultural barriers (e.g., inequalities; Baumeister, 2023; Ronay et al., 2020; Ronay et al., 2022) that constrain the ability to cooperate and thus reduce the likelihood of collective opposition (Thomas et al., 2014). Under such constraints, groups may be unlikely to effectively coordinate to curtail problematic leaders and might instead pursue alternative strategies.

These situational complexities are compounded by the fact that those high in dominance are also willing to take measures to safeguard their power, even when doing so compromises the well-being of the group. For example, when position power is unstable, those inclined toward dominance shape information asymmetries to their advantage by withholding information from other group members (Maner & Mead, 2010), by ostracizing talented group members who might otherwise threaten their power (Maner & Mead, 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012a), and by isolating their subordinates so as to prevent alliances among subordinates that might otherwise pose threat (Case & Maner, 2014).

It is also worth noting that the behavior of many modern leaders is complex and most adopt some blend of dominance and prestige. For example, dominance is likely to be facilitated by having an assembly of allies, or institutional legitimation, so dominance as a leadership strategy might depend on the ability to garner prestige. Conversely, dominant tactics might be employed by prestige-based leaders for the sake of curtailing free-riding or accelerating coordination, and thus prestige as a leadership strategy may be situationally dependent on the selective use of dominance (von Rueden et al., 2014). To the extent that dominance is expressed toward outgroup institutions and members, it may serve to crystalize ingroup identity and so amplify active follower engagement via prestige (Haslam et al., 2022). The ways in which leaders strategically integrate dominance and prestige, as well as how followers perceive and react to such leaders, provide several interesting questions for future research.

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